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The shoes you wear reveal your mood, personality and agenda for the day. These on-trend April styles **#SaySomethingGreat** about who you are and where you're headed.

Spring into action with sexy shoes that announce April has finally arrived.



Stay cute and comfy while running errands in stylish wedge sandals.



KELLY & KATIE RACHEL, \$39.95

Polish your look! Get a "manipedi" with your girlfriends.

This simply perfect clutch compliments the latest looks from the runway.



URBAN EXPRESSIONS FLAP CLUTCH, \$34,95

Make the cut with a sexy spring 'do: a choppy bob.



Throw on your boyfriend jeans, and then pair them with classic sneakers.

Introduce vivid patterns and pops of warm color into your wardrobe.

Ask your honey for a 15-minute foot massage.



vour lunch break and go shoe shopping.

CONVERSE ALL STAR HIGH-TOP



April showers leave you singing (and dancing) in the rain.

Sunday brunch in the city: wear your favorite floral mini-dress.

Block heels are a rising trend, perfect for a "date night" out dancing.

Ditch the car or subway and walk to work.

Give 'em some coralcolored lip (as only you can).

Hit a spin class. Bikini season is almost here!

Sneak out on

Celebrate Earth Day. Spend a leisurely afternoon in the park.

Embrace your inner diva with sky-high heels for an after-work soiree.



Brighten up serious office attire with these multicolored pumps.

Explore your local farmers' market for seasonal, fresh and organic fare.

Kick the winter blues to the curb. Move your workout routine outdoors.



NEW BALANCE 402, \$59.95

Spring fever! You'll feel nothing but hot in these vibrant stilettos.



MADDEN GIRL DITAAA \$49.95

Slip into a pair of shortshorts and show off your legs in strappy sandals.

FRANCO SARTO GUSTAR,

Walk tall

in a hot

new hue.



Ask your kids for breakfast in bed. (Good practice for Mother's Day.)

Update your playlist for a 5-mile power walk.

Embellish your décolletage with this stunning necklace.





Show off your lilac-painted toes in open-toed wedges to make a stylish statement.

Get ready for May. Buy yourself a bouquet of pink blossoms!





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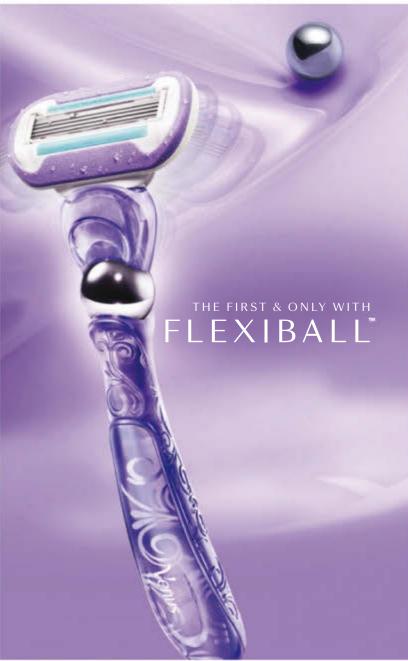
 Empowerment speaker

 Tera Carissa Hodges offers
 a prayer to guide our

 steps in the workplace

NEW Venus Swirl







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WORK. LIFE. BALANCE.

ike you, I come from a long line of working women. My grandmother was employed at the local pajama factory in Fort Deposit, Alabama, where she stood on her feet for hours each day ironing and folding. My mother spent most of her work life as an employee at what once was New Jersey Bell and eventually became Verizon, working her way up to management before opting to take early retirement. I know it wasn't easy for either of them to manage a workload and family life, but they did it with incredible grace, and I learned a lot watching their examples.

It's too early to predict what profession my 11-year-old daughter will choose, but I'm hopeful that my choice to have a career has influenced her positively, and given her an honest look at how to navigate the demands of work and home.

Every month, I hear a myriad of work-life balance anecdotes from women I mentor at Time Inc. (parent company of ESSENCE). No matter the job function, magazine title, ethnic group or experience level, we share the same goal: to not allow the work we do to overwhelm the life we desire to enjoy.

Technology provides us with efficiency, but it also presents challenges that tip the balance toward work. These days it's possible for us to be connected to our jobs wherever we are, and some employers have an expectation—spoken or unspoken—that we make ourselves accessible 24/7. We might feel the pressure to plug in, if for no other reason than to not fall behind on our tasks. I have to admit I am a repeat offender, checking my smartphone while preparing dinner, attending my kids' sports activities or commuting to the office.

How do we restore that balance? Better self-awareness, I feel, is the first We share the same goal: to not allow the work we do to overwhelm the life we desire to enjoy."

step for all of us. That begins

not at work, but at home. By the time you read this, I will have already started a new weekend ritual: a social media sabbatical. I hope you will join me. I mean, will our lives really suffer if we don't upload every life event, update our status or "like" every posting that interests us? I'm more afraid of how our lives—and those of the people we cherish—will suffer if we don't begin to make the kind of meaningful connections that, in the end, are the only ones that really matter.

I'd love to hear how you're finding

balance between work and life. Write to me with your ideas, and they just may appear in the magazine.

Stay in touch,

Varena K. De Luce

VANESSA K. DE LUCA Editor-in-Chief

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Radiant beauty shines from within. P&G's **My Black is Beautiful** celebrates the inner and outer beauty of Black women. It's a platform that connects, inspires and empowers Black women to express their true and best selves to the world.

In fulfilling its mission of helping Black women be their best selves, **My Black is Beautiful** launched the *Imagine A Future* program in 2012 with community partners **BLACK GIRLS ROCK!** and the United Negro College Fund. The three-year program aims to reach and teach one million Black girls to believe their black is beautiful. It provides tools and resources, including scholarships, workshops and the *Imagine A Future* documentary as a conversation starter. Now in its third year, the *Imagine A Future* program has inspired more than 770,000 Black girls to embrace their inner and outer beauty.

My Black is Beautiful is proud to partner with brands including Pantene, Covergirl and Olay who share our vision in celebrating true beauty. Our ambassadors Angelina, Jorian and Jeré exemplify women who are beautiful inside and out. They use their beauty to inspire others!

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Jeré believes in the beauty of a natural look and blogs to encourage others to embrace theirs. She lives the look with **COVERGIRL® Queen Collection CC Cream**. This oil-free cream moisturizes and evens out your skin tone for flawless looking skin...to look like the queen you are.

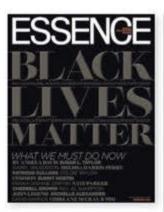


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Our February 2015 Black Lives Matter issue sparked lively conversations among you. Here's some of what you said about "Where Do We Go From Here?":

Being Human

I want to commend you for curating voices of the modern movement. It was a bold statement from a respected brand. As many of us seek leadership and inspiration, it's a relief to know that ESSENCE is unafraid to take a stand. By sharing these perspectives, you reinforced the importance of individual responsibility that we all have to this mission.

Caralene Robinson, **Jersey City**

I love the cover and the collection of essays, but wanted more than six pages. We deserve an entire edition devoted to the topic. I also wish you had focused more on everyday folks. We need to know about those on the front lines.

Erin Cherry, **New York City**

The tablet version of your publication, which was animated for additional effect, was impressive. Cheers to you for covering such a critical discussion. I hope to see other equally dynamic and insightful opinions on the current social climate. (And, yaaas to Isabel Wilkerson's piece!)

Erika Nicole Kendall, via Facebook

All lives should matter; however, they do not. Justice handed down is not the same for me and other people of color. Therefore, we must remind others that Black lives do matter!

Evelyn Reaves, Rochester, NY

The essays by Michelle Alexander and Nate Parker resonated with me. As a young woman living in New York City, I can honestly say that their message was one

to uplift our community. Police brutality must stop, and it's up to us to unite and make our demands heard. This is a nationwide human rights issue.

Arnel Iyesha Evans, via Facebook

I was moved by your entire issue and got great ideas to share with my fifth-grade class. Your coverage of the protest march ["Enough Is Enough"] and Black History Month book recommendations ["Wisdom for Every Age"] were particular favorites, but "Where Do We Go From Here?" was a standout. Kudos on a job well done.

Sharon A. White. **Brooklyn**

Put a Ring on It

Tony Gaskins, Jr.'s approach ["What Makes a Black Man Say 'I Do' "] sounds good to me. It's a great example to model so that the one who is meant for you will find you. Real love involves finding yourself first and loving yourself enough to notice when the opposite sex is of the same mind.

Ori Afolabi-Chisholm, Beaufort, SC

Please do not publish any more articles on how we should get a man, written by a man. Black women are frustrated enough with dating. To read a story from his perspective is overkill. @shanmarie808.

Wealth Legacy

via Twitter

I appreciate features like "Secure Your Financial Future." I found the tips helpful, especially since I am behind in building my savings. I would like to learn more about how to construct a budget and ways to save.

Jacqueline Thomas, via Facebook

CORRECTION

In "Secure Your Financial Future," we incorrectly stated that the Kiddie Fund is a nickname for a statesponsored college savings plan. Kara King-Bess contributed to the Kiddie Fund before investing in the Maryland 529 plans for her children's education. We regret the errors.

CONTRIBUTORS



YLONDA **GAULT CAVINESS**

(@TheRealYlonda) shares how to help your kids survive exam season in "Testing 1, 2,3" (page 114). The former parenting edi-

tor wrote the upcoming book Child, Please. Her boss move: "Years ago I realized the boss I most needed to please was staring at me in the mirror. I started reframing my career choices to suit my needs and my family."



KWAKU ALSTON

(@KwakuAlston) has captured famous faces from Brad Pitt to our iconic cover of the Obama family. This month he snaps Kelly Rowland and

her family for "Oh Baby!" (page 46).

Their connection: "I first photographed Kelly with Destiny's Child for their debut album. Almost 20 years later, I'm shooting Kelly as a wife and a new mother."



ZOEY WASHINGTON

(@littlebirdstyle), our contributing fashion editor, shows how to add personality to your professional wardrobe in "Work It, Girl" (page 86).

She is the creator of LITTLEbird, a fashion styling company for tweens and teens. Her office look: "I love a skirt and sweater combo with a little leather. If I get my hands on a leather skirt, I stock up."







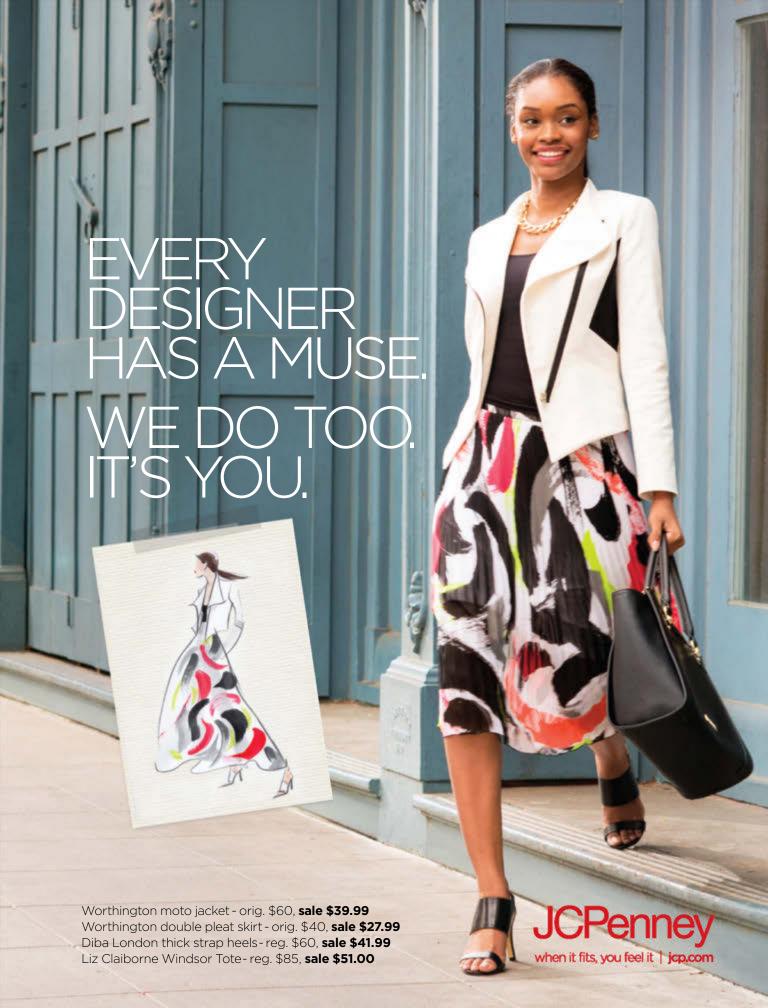












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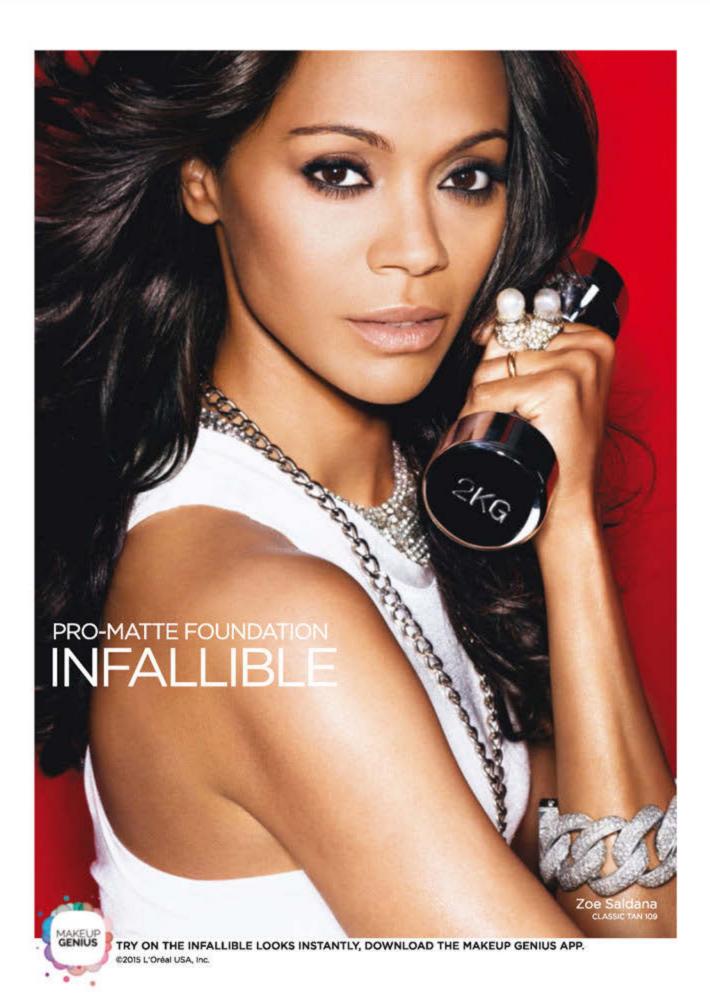
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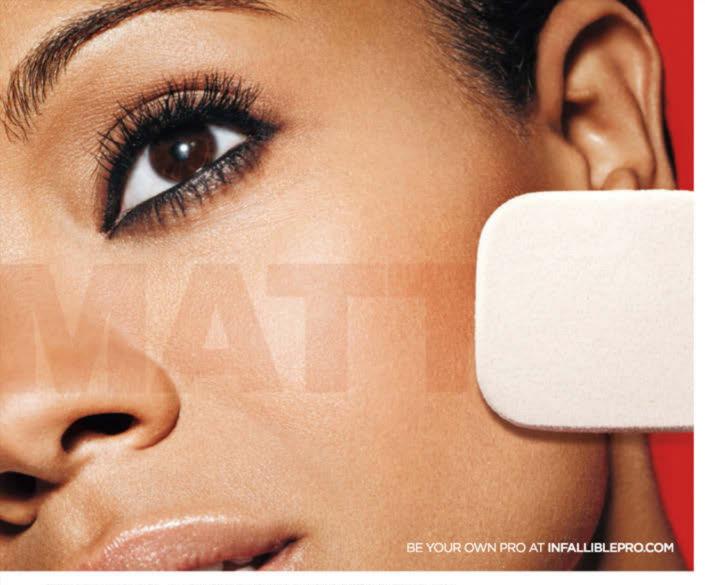
HOLLYWOOD'S
BEST BROUGHT
THEIR A-GAME
GLAM TO THIS
AWARD SEASON'S
RED CARPETS

BY NYKIA D. SPRADLEY PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS KOLK

From the Golden Globes to the Grammys, this winter's crop of breakout stars, and some of our all-time celeb faves, hit the red carpet and award show after-parties, in everything from vibrant lip shades to fun braids. Nick Barose, who dolled up Gugu Mbatha-Raw (left) for her AAFCA Awards win, went for a feminine and glamorous look with a bit of forties flair. "It's bold but feminine," says Barose.

BEAUTY





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BEAUTY: RED CARPET



SEXY EYES, PALE LIPS

Bronze or gold shadow on the lid and brow bone softens the eyes. For lips, it's important to line them with a rich, medium brown liner. "Blend it in to prevent nude lipstick from appearing chalky," says makeup artist Mario Dedivanovic, who created Gabrielle Union's sultry look.



FROM TOP: FIRST ROW, FROM LEFT: STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE: JASON MERRITT/GETTY IMAGES ENTERTAINMENT; MICHAEL TRAN/FILMMAGIC; STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE; LILLY LAWRENCE/ GETTY IMAGES ENTERTAINMENT. SECOND ROW, FROM LEFT: ALBERTO E. RODRIGUEZ/GETTY IMAGES RYTERTAINMENT; JASON LAVERIS/ FILMMAGIC; RFAZER HARRISON/GETTY IMAGES ENTERTAINMENT; SMALLS&RASKIND/GETTY IMAGES ENTERTAINMENT; MICHAEL KOVAC/GETTY IMAGES ENTERTAINMENT; THIRD ROW, FROM LEFT: LARRY BUSACCA/GETTY IMAGES WIREIMAGE; ANGELA WEITS/GETTY IMAGES ENTERTAINMENT; MICHAEL BEZJIAN/WIREIMAGE; RICHAEL, FOUNTH ROW, FROM LEFT: LARRY BUSACCA/GETTY IMAGES ENTERTAINMENT; ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES ENTERTAINMENT; JEFF VESPA/WIREIMAGE; STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE; AMANDA EDWARDS/WIREIMAGE.

SHADES OF FABU-LIPS

From pretty pinks to deep, seductive plums, cool lip colors cover the gamut



Beyoncé 57th Annual **Grammy Awards**



Rihanna 57th Annual Grammy Awards



Ciara **ESSENCE Black** Women in Music Event



Paula Patton 21st Annual SAG Awards



Tamera Mowry-Housley Club MomMe Annual Fall Family Fest



Uzo Aduba 46th NAACP Image Awards



Jordin Sparks Delta Airlines Toasts 2015 Grammy Weekend



Oprah Winfrey Academy Awards Nominee Luncheon



Viola Davis 41st Annual People's **Choice Awards**



Aja Naomi King Elle Women in Television Celebration



Carmen Ejogo 15th Annual AFI Awards



Rashida Jones 21st Annual **SAG Awards**



Kerry Washington The Limited Scandal Spring 2015 Launch Event



Jhené Aiko 2015 Grammy **Nomination Dinner**



Kat Graham ESSENCE Black Women in Music Event



Keke Palmer MusiCares 2015 Person of the Year Gala



Danielle Brooks 21st Annual **SAG Awards**



Jennifer Hudson 57th Annual **Grammy Awards**

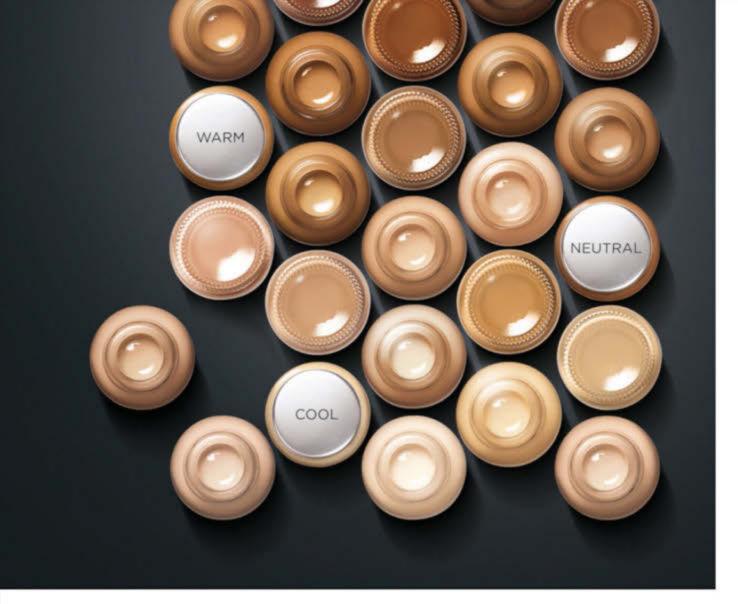


Jessica White The Daily Front Row's **Fashion Awards**



Jerrika Hinton 46th NAACP Image Awards ▷

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TEXTURE PLAY

"Patience is key when creating frizz-free curls," explains hairstylist Brian Fisher, who coiffed Tessa Thompson's tresses. Use a diffuser to dry, then press a lightweight oil into the top layers and separate curls in the underlayers for volume.









56

Beautiful, natural textures are timeless and can be glammed up to suit any event. 99

-BRIAN FISHER, CELEBRITY HAIRSTYLIST







Twists and braids are no longer reserved for the daytime. Dress up plaits by mixing various braid sizes or adding a soft, face-framing wave like hairstylist Kim Kimble did on Taraji P. Henson.



BEAUTY: SPECIAL

DAYS OF BLACK BEAL

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HAIR: OUR HAIR

CHUCKIE'S TOOLBOX

IT TAKES MORE THAN A LITTLE HAIR SPRAY TO CREATE CHUCK AMOS'S MAGIC. HERE'S TO THE GOOD STUFF THAT DELIVERS GREAT WORK

BY PAMELA EDWARDS CHRISTIANI PHOTOGRAPHY BY WARWICK SAINT

Diane Small Tint/Dye Brush (similar styles,

sleekhair.com).

All Magnetics Magnetic Wand Tube Kit (\$10, all magnetics.com). Clips not included.

Bingo with Aunt Barbara gave me the idea to use a magnetic wand to whisk up hairpins, as opposed to bingo chips."

I love how this spray rids the hair of excess oils while creating movable, shapable texture."

> **Oribe** Thick Dry Finishing Spray (\$39, oribe.com).

(\$39, oribe.co

COST STATE (A-B)

Sketching gives

me a blueprint

of what the styles will look like

on screen

or page.'



I cut and round the edges to take out the flexibility of tint brushes. The stiff bristles are excellent for smoothing edges."

JUMP MANAGEMENT. MAKEUP, RENEE GARNES/ARTISTS AT . MANICURE, MISS POP FOR CHANEL. AMOS, SHANE BALLARD

Alcone Company Powder Atomizer Jar (\$26, alconeco.com). **Toppik** Hair Building Fibers (\$47, toppik.com). □



APRIL 2015 ESSENCE.COM 18



















elly Rowland is surrounded by love. She breezes into the Four Seasons in Beverly Hills pushing a carriage and looking like the picture of bliss. She peeks in on her little one, Titan Jewell Weatherspoon, before slipping into her seat and discussing the immense changes she has undergone over the past year. There are no entourages, glam squads or hangers-on in tow. There isn't a team of assistants, handlers or managers policing her every word. On this sunny day in Los Angeles, it's just Rowland, her husband Tim Weatherspoon, and their little bundle of joy.

"I just love looking at him," she gushes, beaming from ear to ear. "This is such an important time for a baby and I just don't want to miss anything."

Weatherspoon chimes in, ably expanding on just how the couple feel about their son. "It's like a different kind of love," he says. "Yeah, I love my sneakers, I love my car, but that's not a good comparison. I think it's beyond what you can explain."

In 2014, Rowland and Weatherspoon found themselves coping with the full spectrum of human emotions. They jumped the broom in May and welcomed Titan in November. Then, in December, Rowland's mother, Doris Rowland Garrison, died unexpectedly of cardiac arrest at age 66. While many would be reeling from having to deal with such life-altering events in the span of seven months, Rowland remains positive. Why? Love is on her side.

"When you lose a parent, you're always getting over it, because you've spent so long with somebody and then they're no longer there," she explains, her voice cracking with

"My road to my happiness hasn't been an easy one. It hasn't been peachy all the time, but I am so, so happy," she says, grinning again.

Rowland's good mood has a lot to do with her husband. According to the singer, Weatherspoon—who's also her manager—had a thing for her for years before they finally decided to date.

"I was his celebrity girl crush," the 34-year-old songstress remembers, giggling. Though the details of the story differ slightly depending on whom you ask, Rowland and Weatherspoon agree that their connection was undeniable from the beginning.

"I've known Michelle [Williams] since she was 7," Weatherspoon says, explaining that he met Rowland through her Destiny's Child bandmate nearly 15 years ago. Completely enamored with his future wife, Weatherspoon, now 41, asked Williams for the hookup. "I didn't think anything of Tim having a crush on Kelly because [back then] my friends had their favorites. Some of my male friends were crushing on Bey, some were crushing on Kelly," Williams says of her childhood friend. Although Weatherspoon would frequently drop hints about his affection for Rowland, Williams didn't expect their friendship to blossom into anything more. "It took some years for me to put two and two together, but they fell in love, and it was real love," she says. "Tim has Kelly's back no matter what."

But Rowland and Weatherspoon's intense bond was almost too overwhelming for the star.

"He scared me," she says plainly. "I was in this crazy relationship and I called him crying. I was like, 'I'm not going to

MY ROAD TO MY HAPPINESS HASN'T BEEN AN EASY ONE. IT HASN'T BEEN PEACHY ALL THE TIME, BUT I AM SO, SO HAPPY.

emotion. "I woke up the other morning and I was on my way to the gym. I picked up my phone to call her and I was like, Oh, my God, I can't talk to my mom."

Instead Rowland reached out to her huge extended family for support. "I called my mom's best friend, Aunt Viv. The next day I called my mom's other best friend, Auntie Bev. Their spirits feel like her, so it helps me get through.

"I have such a wonderful family," Rowland continues. "Mama T [Tina Knowles], Bey [Beyoncé], Angie [Beyoncé and Solange's cousin] and Solange. I'm so grateful to be surrounded with so much love. Nobody wants me to miss out on any of that."

Though she's still struggling with the loss of her mother, Rowland's joy in her current situation is palpable. Whenever she talks about the changes her son has gone through in his first few months of life, or her Saturday trips to the movies with her husband, Rowland's flawless brown face is transformed by an infectious smile.

get into a relationship for at least a year. Then after that, I'll wait until God sends me a man.'"

Rowland wasn't prepared for what came next, however. "He said, 'What if you took that time and at the end of that year God sends you a dude, and that dude is me?'"

Her first response? Run.

"She hung up on me," Weatherspoon says. "She didn't talk to me for a whole month."

Soon, though, Rowland began to long reconsider their severed connection, and when she got over her fear, she realized she was finally ready for her soul mate. "I missed him every day," she recounts, gazing at her husband with unabashed tenderness.

Six years later, the couple did the unimaginable: They pulled off an ultraprivate wedding. "We didn't even tell the publicist," Weatherspoon says. When the media realized Rowland's famous friends had jetted down to Costa Rica for the ceremony, D

Rowland and Weatherspoon knew the jig was up. "Once the news got out that certain people were there at the same time, they were like, 'You need to respond.'"

While many of her industry peers readily exchange vows in lavish productions full of pomp, pageantry and paparazzi, Rowland and Weatherspoon wanted to celebrate their nuptials on their own terms. The couple, along with all their guests, wore white as the pair pledged to love, honor and cherish each other forever.

"It was so intimate. It was the most perfect thing because we didn't have a care in the world," Rowland says, another smile playing on her lips.

The two are taking the same discreet approach to their relationship. Despite living in a digital age when celebrities often share every single detail of their personal lives on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, the Weatherspoons want to keep their lives out of the harsh glare of publicity.

"We like it private," Rowland says, and her husband is quick to echo her sentiments. "I don't like the spotlight," Weatherspoon admits. "I work in this business, so I get it. You learn to manage that, and don't take it personally," he

And it seems to be working. The multiplatinum artist began writing and recording some new music during her pregnancy, and is back in the studio now that Titan is here.

"It's been a challenge," Rowland admits. "Ultimately, it's about trying to understand time management, because I definitely want to be a great wife, I want to be a great mommy and I want to make great music."

hankfully, Rowland's dramatic life has served as the perfect muse for her upcoming album, which will feature a mixture of up-tempo songs and heartfelt ballads. "You have no choice but to tap into emotions when you're in the studio. The same way we're experiencing those emotions, whether it's having a child or losing a parent or whatever it might be, everybody is experiencing the same pain or happiness that you're experiencing as well," she explains. "As much as it been a roller-coaster ride these past couple of months, it's been so great, honestly, for what I'm bringing forth in the studio."

Rowland gave fans a glimpse inside her inspired new sound just days after her son was born with the release of

MY MOM JUST LOVED ME AND MY BROTHER SO MUCH. HER LOVE WAS SO BIG. SHE LOVED SO HARD. I WANT TO PASS THAT TO MY SON.

says of the sometimes vicious comments he and Rowland receive on social media.

One thing the couple does take personally is their relationship. While Rowland is completely in awe of being a mother, she plans to put her marriage to Titan's daddy first.

"The baby doesn't change who we are as people. We still like to go have dinner. We do the activities that we do every day. I don't think that should stop," Weatherspoon says. "We keep things simple in our relationship. I look at her as my friend and I don't take that for granted. You find those things that bring you together and you do them. Sometimes they're going to be with Titan, sometimes they're going to be without him."

For Rowland, her identity is clear. She's a wife first, mother second and an artist third. "My priority is my husband first," she says, laughing. While some may balk at her choice, for Rowland, the reason is quite simple: "That's how the baby got there."

Of course, balancing marriage, motherhood and her career will not be easy, but Rowland looks to the examples of many of her friends who seem to be successfully juggling all three. "They make it look so glamorous and easy, and I'm looking at them trying to figure out how in the hell are you doing this and balancing it all so well and looking so great?" she says with a laugh. "I just follow them and I'm super-appreciative."

"Mommy's Little Baby," a sweet lullaby for Titan. On the melodic track, Rowland opens up to her son, telling him, "I've waited all my life to see ya. I've been dreaming about you." The tune perfectly sums up Rowland's overwhelming love for and devotion to her son, a lesson she learned from her mother.

"One of the things I know about my mom is she just loved me and my brother so much. Her love was so big. She loved so hard, and I always want to be able to pass that to my son," Rowland says.

Although her mother's passing was unanticipated, one thing that gives Rowland some solace is that her mom was completely head over heels for her grandson. "All she wanted to do was hold him," Rowland says fondly. "I was doing something with the baby in the house after we came home from the hospital and she was there with me and she just looked at me and she said, 'I'm so proud of you.' I listen to that every day in my head. It makes me very happy.

"That's been the blessing," she says, still high on her mother's love. "My husband's family is so wonderful. I can't complain about anything because God still has me surrounded with the most beautiful light of love." □

Britni Danielle (@BritniDWrites) is a Los Angeles-based writer. She interviewed Erykah Badu, Ledisi and Solange for our May 2014 issue.



2015'S SPRING MOVIE PREVIEW

WITH THIS SEASON'S BLOCKBUSTERS COME NEW STARS IN THE MAKING BY ZEBA BLAY

Name: Nathalie Emmanuel Age: 26

Hometown: Southend-on-Sea, Essex, England Where You've Seen Her:

Emmanuel is best known for playing the stoic ex-slave Missandei on HBO's *Game of Thrones*. She makes her big-screen debut in *Furious 7* (April 3).

On Shifting From TV to

Film: "It was intimidating to walk into, but my first day I got big hugs and kisses from the cast. It's a huge transition, a completely different style, physically demanding. I really enjoyed the challenge."





Name: Keiynan Lonsdale Age: 23

Hometown: Sydney,

Australia

New Kid in Town: The Aussie got his start on TV down under, and appears in his first movie role, opposite Shailene Woodley in *The Divergent*Series: Insurgent (March 20).

On His Character Uriah:

"He's a fighter, but he's also a free thinker. He sees beyond what he's told. He's also sensitive and empathetic and he just wants more out of life. He adds a lightness to the film. He's just got this young, beautiful, charming energy around him."

On the Postapocalyptic
Movie Trend: "People like to
look at society in a different
way. But when you watch
this film you're not just
watching a movie about a
[segregated] world, you're
actually part of it."

ESTER DEAN, PITCH PERFECT 2

Name: Ester Dean

Age: 33

Hometown: Tulsa What She's Known For:

Writing hit songs for the likes of Rihanna and Katy Perry.

On Acting for the First

Time: "The first month on *Pitch Perfect* was boot camp. I hadn't sung or danced in years and I was like, *What am I doing here?*"

On Returning for *Pitch*Perfect 2 (May 15): "This time I came in really

time I came in really knowing who I am and who my character is. Acting gave



me confidence and inspired me to be myself. Every girl on that screen is being who she is, and just living her life to the fullest." >

MORE SCREEN GEMS!

Look who's returning to the movies





Don
Cheadle
joins the
all-star
cast of The
Avengers:
Age of
Ultron
(May 1).



RICHARD CARTWRIGHT/UNIVERSAL PICTURES; JASIN BOLAND; @MA @MAWORKS ANIMATION; UNIVERSAL PICTURES; JASON MERRITT/GETT



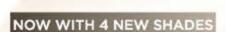
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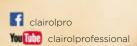


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As a mom, you make it your job to make everyone happy. But that usually means your happy gets put on hold. But what if you could reconnect as a family with plenty of "we time," while also reveling in grown-up "me time" to recharge?

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WE TIME

66 Finding something to do for a 11, 8, and 5 year old may seem like a challenge but not here at Walt Disney World® Resort. There is something for everyone not just for the young at heart. ??





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ME TIME:

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ASSORTED FLAVORS

CATCH SPRING FEVER WITH FOUR BOOKS THAT APPEAL TO EVERY READER'S TASTE. FROM SWEET TO SPICY!

FOR MYSTERY LOVERS

Jay Porter, the struggling Houston lawyer at the heart of Attica Locke's compelling 2009 tome, Black Water Rising, can't seem to stay out of trouble. Pleasantville (Harper, \$26.99), the author's equally intriguing third effort, picks



environmental laws. The win is bittersweet because convoluted legal loopholes have held up the big check our hero had hoped to receive. On the brink of giving up practicing law, Porter inadvertently steps into a messy situation: When a young girl disappears from Pleasantville, a well-to-do H-Town hamlet. the lawyer is called to defend a young man who has been declared a person of interest. And that is only the beginning of this taut thriller, which is knitted with enough shock and awe and backroom politics to keep you reading and guessing

tica

Locke



all weekend long.

FOR THE GROWN & SEXY If I wore a hat, I would take it off for Eric Jerome

Dickey. Since the mid-nineties, this Memphis native has penned more than 21 novels, most of which were New York Times best sellers. I'm looking for One Night (Dutton, \$26.95), his latest page-turner, to please the storyteller's fan base. Understanding the fiction rule that most times less can be more, Dickey gives us two characters who meet one evening—beautiful Jackie Summers and a dude known as The Man From Orange County. Just when you think this is a sepia-toned-novel version of the chatty *Before* film trilogy, starring Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy, Dickey ratchets up the plot in ways that are both risqué and rewarding. He uses the power of dialogue to give us greater shades of a character's motivation. Over 348 pages, and in a span of 12 hours, the duo talk and talk and talk some more, sometimes getting into heated exchanges about racial politics. In between pauses, we learn that one

Eric erome

of them may be involved in a murder and the other may be the next victim.

FOR THE FAMILY-CENTERED Warning: When you start The Turner House (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt,



\$23). Angela Flournoy's impressive debut. there may be a tinge of discom-

fort. Stay with it. It's just your mind and body reacting to many difficult truths about the way family holds us together and sometimes drives us mad. Set in 2008 on Detroit's East Side, the book follows the Turners, who are in jeopardy of losing their home. In skillful language, Flournoy does more to educate us on the housing bubble burst and its impact on everyday Americans than any business journal.



FOR YOUNG READERS

A major big up to Tracey Baptiste, author of the endlessly addictive and hypnotic new read, The Jumbies (Algonquin Young Readers, \$15.95). According to Caribbean folklore, a jumbie is a "bad-thinking, sneaky, trick-loving creature that comes out at night with the purpose of causing mischief." But it doesn't scare feisty 12-year-old heroine Corinne La Mer. That is, until Severine, a mysterious beauty. shows up at Corinne's home. No one, least of all Corinne's father, suspects that Severine is up to no good. Baptiste has a lot of fun remixing the classic Haitian folktale The Magic Orange Tree, while adding her own original touches.





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RACHEL ELIZA GRIFFITHS

NO ORDINARY LOVE

AN AWARD-WINNING POET SHARES HER POWERFUL LIFE STORY

₹ he left us at night." So begins Ordinary Light (Knopf, \$25.95), Tracy K. Smith's haunting and lyrical memoir. "It had felt like night for a long time, the days at once short and ceaselessly long." With this deft description, Smith immediately dives into one of life's most painful experiences: losing a parent. The opening scene in Light finds Smith, just 22, grappling with her mother's last moment while in hospice care. Yet by the end, Smith's latest and most personal work turns out to be one of the most spirited and triumphant reads of the season.

Growing up in northern California as the voungest of five children. the author had what appeared to be an idyllic childhood. The Smith household, including an engineer father and an attentive stay-at-home mother, was filled with books, freshbaked delicacies and buoyant opportunities under a golden sun.

That tableau shifts when the family matriarch is diagnosed with cancer. Forced to think about her future, Smith questions many of the ideals and the sheltered upbringing that once provided her with secu-

rity and comfort. When she arrives at Harvard University in the early 1990's, she is aching to live, give and share love: "I arrived in Cambridge eager for small freedoms. I wanted to go out at night. I wanted to be able to wander the streets of a city, to disappear into bookstores and movie

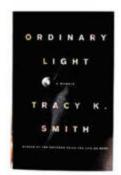


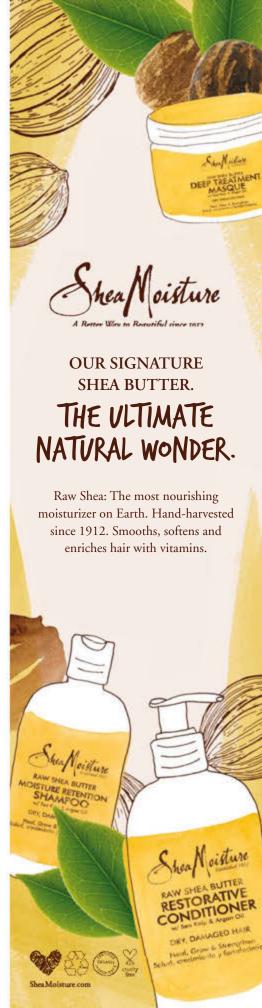
theaters. I wanted to be able to drink alcohol and kiss boys."

Smith won the 2012 Pulitzer Prize in poetry for Life on Mars, her third collection. A prescient 2011 New York Times review of Mars foreshadowed the towering talent readers would find four years later in Ordinary Light: "Smith shows herself to be a poet of extraordinary range and ambition. It's not easy to be so convincing in both the grand gesture and the reverent contemplation of a humble plate of eggs.... As all the best poetry does, Life on Mars first sends us out into the magnificent chill of the imagination and then returns us to ourselves, both changed and consoled."

Showing an impressive command and confidence of language, Ordinary Light presents a dazzling array of images that shift between a knowing young girl and an introspective woman. As the decidedly complex narrative unfolds, neither

> voice cedes its strongwilled opinions until the two perspectives merge and Smith, finally whole, sees herself in an entirely different light. You will, as well. And you will also feel as if you've just connected with one of our most gifted writers to watch for many, many years to come. -P.H.B.







ISSUES

RACE MATTERS

Forty-nine percent of Americans believe addressing **race relations should be a top priority** for the President and Congress in 2015, according to a Pew Research Center study. Two years ago, that number was zero.



A Brooklyn middle school has raised more than \$1 million to take its current and future sixth-grade students to visit Harvard. When Vidal Chastanet (pictured here with the President), a sixth-grader at Mott Hall Bridges Academy, caught the attention of the photographer behind the popular blog Humans of New York, he unwittingly thrust his school into the public stratosphere, garnering viral financial support. The school's principal, Nadia Lopez, also plans to develop a summer program with some of the funds.



"It wasn't easy, but I'm much stronger, and I am in a better place than I was." — Marissa Alexander, the Florida mother who spent three years in prison for firing a warning shot at her husband, on *Anderson Cooper 360*.

SIGNAL BOOST

In an effort to augment diversity in STEM fields, the Obama administration has awarded \$25 million to 13 HBCUs, such as Norfolk State University and North Carolina A&T University, to fund cybersecurity education and programs.



COOKIES OUT, SOCIAL JUSTICE IN

Meet the Radical Brownies: an empowerment group for girls of color in Oakland. The mini troops (no affiliation with Girl Scouts) **learn about civil rights issues and participate in Black Lives Matter protests** (with parent leaders, of course). Their signature berets are an ode to the Black Panther Party.

A STEP TOWARD JUSTICE

The NYPD cop who killed unarmed 28-year-old Akai Gurley was indicted by a grand jury in February. In the wake of recent high-profile non-indictments of police officers in the killings of Black men, the news comes as a possible indicator of change in the justice system.

I can't tell you what a shock it was to find out that this young woman...a high-performing individual, was struggling with these issues right beneath our nose.... This administration is not going to walk on by and pretend the mental health crisis doesn't exist. We're going to make a plan.

-First lady of NYC Chirlane McCray, addressing her daughter's struggle with depression and announcing the city's new health initiative.

THE FIGHT TO END CANCER
The relatives of beloved sports journalist Stuart Scott have teamed up with The V Foundation for Cancer Research to establish a fund in his memory. Some of the monies will go toward research for Black men and women, who succumb to the disease at disproportionate rates.



10 HEALTH FIRST

"In the African-American community, we don't see breast-feeding publicly—our sisters and aunts aren't breast-feeding in the living room, they're not talking about it in the kitchen," Dalvery Blackwell, cofounder of Milwaukee's African American Breastfeeding Network, told the *Chicago Defender*. To remedy this, AABN hosts meet-ups where **new and expectant mothers can learn the best practices for nursing their children**.



3. OFFICIAL WHITE HOUSE PHOTO BY PETE SOUZA, 4. BOB MACK/THE FLORIDA TIMES-UNION/AP PHOTO, 6. COURTESY OF THE RADICAL BROWNIES. 9. HAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES FOR MICHAEL JORDAN CELEBRITY INVITATIONAL













A New Erafor Afro-Cubans

WHAT OUR COUNTRY'S CHANGING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ISLAND REPUBLIC COULD MEAN FOR ITS BLACK CITIZENS BY KAREN RUNDLET

esenia Fernández Selier, an Afro-Cuban dancer and Ph.D. student, cheered when President Barack Obama announced the political thaw between the United States and Cuba last December. It was a huge shift—the U.S. and Cuban governments had been adversaries for more than 50 years.

Now, both countries have vowed to normalize relations. Among the changes: An American embassy will be reestablished in Cuba; political prisoners in both countries have been released; American citizens are allowed to travel to Cuba for humanitarian work and public performances without special approval; and some imports and exports will be allowed between the countries (though the trade embargo is still not completely lifted).

To understand why this diplomatic breakthrough is such a feat, first, some history: The two countries' complicated

relationship was at its most hostile during the Cold War, when Fidel Castro—who came to power during the Cuban Revolution of 1959—forged an alliance with the Soviet Union. This, and ideological differences around Cuba's communist leadership (which sanctioned egregious human rights violations), led the U.S. to impose a trade embargo on the country in 1960. The goal was to make life so difficult for Cubans that Castro's government would crumble and move toward democracy. But the new embargo exacerbated tensions (most notably the Cuban Missile Crisis), plus Cuba had a powerful trading partner in the Soviet Union and didn't need U.S. exports.

Scores of White Cubans, descendants of Spanish colonists, looking to flee Castro's regime sought exile in the United States. "The first wave of Cubans to the U.S. in the sixties was about 90 percent White," says Guillermo Grenier,













a professor of global and sociocultural studies at Florida International University. By contrast, most Black Cubans, descendants of African slaves, stayed behind. "The revolution was greatly supported by Black and mulatto Cubans," says Grenier. Under Castro, citizens were given free education and health care, and the communist leader also vowed to wipe out racial inequalities, all of which largely appealed to Black Cubans, who made up a significant portion of Cuba's working class and laborers.

But when the Cold War ended in 1991. Cuba's economy buckled without Soviet support. Black Cubans, who were on the lowest rungs of the socioeconomic ladder, were hit hardest. And many White Cubans, bolstered by the remittances they'd been receiving from their relatives who had fled to the U.S., were able to supplement their incomes and live at a higher standard. In fact, a study by Miami-based Havana Consulting Group found that in 2013, Cuban-Americans sent relatives on the island a record \$2.77 billion—money that disproportionately helped Whites. "Racism became acute after the 1990's in Cuba," says Selier, who explains further that the government cut deals with private sector foreign investors, and Afro-Cubans weren't able to secure better-paying positions in the new, more lucrative tourism industry. Two economies existed: a free market one for White Cubans and the old, broken socialist one for Black and mixed-race Cubans.

Selier sees the new policy shift as a progressive opportunity for Cuba. And she's not alone: A 2014 FIU poll found that Cubans who self-identified as mulato or negro were more likely to oppose the trade embargo, support unrestricted

66 Two economies existed: a free market one for White Cubans and the old, broken socialist one for Black and mixed-race Cubans.

travel by American citizens and favor diplomatic relations than Cubans who describe themselves as White.

Leslie Aldama, 44, a Realtor associate who grew up in Guantánamo Bay and came to Miami in the late 1980's, says her Black Cuban parents voted Republican for decades because they believed in the GOP's position: that the embargo would take down the notorious Castro. But now, Aldama says, even some members of the older exile community are changing their stance: "My parents voted Democrat in the past two elections. They're starting to understand that the embargo hasn't changed anything."

So what's next? A battle in Congress. In January, a bipartisan group of senators introduced the Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act of 2015. They'll no doubt face significant pushback from those who argue that President Obama gave the Cuban government commercial incentives without much in return. Whatever the changes to come, the lines of communication have officially been opened.

Karen Rundlet (@kbmiami) is a multimedia journalist at the Miami Herald. She is also a contributor to WLRN-FM, NPR's Miami station.



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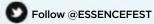


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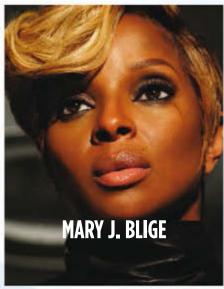
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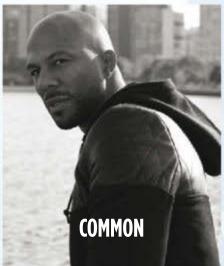
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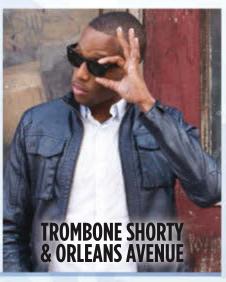






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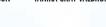
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Get tips from the multi-talented Kandi Burruss on getting your side hustle right! Financial expert Lynnette Khalfani-Cox will help you tackle that lingering student loan debt. Small business guru Melinda Emerson shares insider tips on how to become your own boss. And if you have a big dream to break into the entertainment biz, singer Kelly Price breaks down the do's and don'ts.

LOVE & RELATIONSHIPS

Calling all singles: Stop by our workshops led by Paul Carrick Brunson (The Modern-Day Matchmaker) and ESSENCE.com contributors Kelli Fisher and Tana Gilmore (The Match-Making Duo)!

And if you've found love...
Newlyweds Sarah Jakes and
Touré Roberts will talk about
faith and your soul mate, and
Fawn Weaver, founder of the
Happy Wives Club, shares the
secrets of joyful marriages.

HEALTHY LIVING

Cynthia Bailey joins author Gessie Thompson, the White Dress Project's Tanika Gray Valbrun, and Dr. Cheruba Prabakar for a conversation about living with fibroids fearlessly and fabulously.

PLUS: Tonya Lewis Lee, producer and founder of HealthyYouNow.com, gives you the tools to find your personal path to better health, and "Insanity" workout creator Shaun T takes your questions on starting (and sticking with) a fitness routine.

*Space is limited for these EMPOWER U workshops so please sign up at EssenceFestival.com.



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FOR CULTURE & COMMUNITY

ESSENCE EMPOWERMENT **EXPERIENCE**

Keynotes and panels with the biggest tv personalities, authors and gospel artists.

EMPOWERMENT STAGE AT THE GREAT HALL OF THE ERNEST N. MORIAL CONVENTION CENTER

FREE DAILY 9:00AM — 5:00PM*

HERE'S A PREVIEW, WITH MORE TO BE ANNOUNCED:

#BlackLivesMatter: Exploring the Progress of Modern Day Activism and What We Must Do Next

A Mother/Daughter Journey: Join a Conversation on How to Keep this Family Dynamic Strong and Honest

Criminal Justice: Protecting Our Sons & Communities from Violence

Domestic Violence: Why We All Must Break the Silence

Hurricane Katrina 10 Years Later: A Look Back as a Path Forward

Voting Rights Act 50th Anniversary: The Fight Is Far from Over

Moms on a Mission: Mothers Turning Tragedy into Triumphant Change

Economic Equality: Get Paid What You're Really Worth

Black Women's Health Agenda: Putting Yourself First (No More Excuses)

Future Leaders: Meet the Next Generation's Game Changers

#NoJudgementZone: We Are Our Sister's Keepers

Women at Work: How to Fire Your Boss and Become Your Own

Education Reform: Everything You Need to Know for Your Child to Have a Quality Education



THE SHOPS AT ESSENCE

LOVE TO SHOP? EAT? SHARE?

NEW ORLEANS LOUISIANA

Coca Cola

Indulge at the Festival at the Shops at ESSENCE® in the **Ernest N. Morial Convention** Center. Here's what's in store and our Shops at ESSENCE Vendors of the Month.



Lamar's Famous Creole Style Wings has been a vendor at ESSENCE for 18 years and is one of the oldest



vendors with the festival. He serves his famous creole wings with his special sauce throughout the city at multiple events and his most famous customer is Fats Domino. His goal is to franchise his company with his son, Lamar Smith III.



Sharika Mahdi, New Orleans Native, and long-time ESSENCE art vendor is known for her "Happy" style of figurative art.

"Art is like meditation where my thoughts are clear and time and space become invisible. I seek to inspire and bring positive feelings with every piece."



REV. AL SHARPTON



IYANLA VANZANT



SYBRINA FULTON



DEITRICK HADDON



CLAUDIA JORDAN



SHAUN T



LYNN WHITFIELD & GRACE GIBSON



CYNTHIA BAILEY & NOELLE ROBINSON

ESTIVAL FIRST



ALICE RANDALL & CAROLINE RANDALL WILLIAMS



THE WALLS GROUP



ANITA WILSON **DEEPAK CHOPRA** JOINS THE **EMPOWERMENT**

EXPERIENCE!

Sunday, July 5th in the Great Hall at **Ernest N. Morial** Convention Center, celebrate our 2015 All-Star Gospel **Tribute honoree**



KIM BURRELL



f you've ever straightened your natural hair before an important meeting or code-switched on a conference call, you're not alone. But a groundbreaking ESSENCE study about Black women's experiences in White-dominated workplaces shows that altering key aspects of our identities in order to blend in is not only psychologically damaging, but it could also be keeping us from scoring the promotions we deserve.

What we found is that scores of us are so worried about being perceived negatively that we hide our authentic selves in the workplace, choosing instead to tone down our appearance, soften our demeanor and hold back in our conversations. More than 70 percent of the 650 African-American women we surveyed fear being labeled an Angry Black Woman by their coworkers, and 40 percent believe others see them as the Acculturated Girl Next Door, a professional woman who is unthreatening, safe and adaptable.

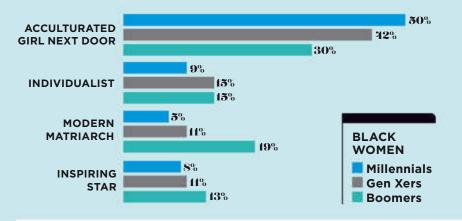
Switching between "work me" and "personal me" is exhausting and doing us more harm than good. When you hide your true self behind a mask at work, it's like walking around with your hands tied, says Kym Harris, Ed.D., president of Your SweetSpot Coaching and Consulting in Atlanta. "When you use so much energy being something you're not, you don't have enough left to be the best you can be."

What's more: This strategy isn't even giving us the results we want. Our study showed that Black women in the upper echelons of corporate America (CEOs, CFOs and so on) did not limit themselves to being viewed as the girl next door, but rather they believe others perceive them as Inspiring Stars, women who are more eager to take risks, open up and share the unique traits that make them different.

So how can we use this knowledge to our advantage? When you let your guard down and allow bosses and colleagues to see your distinct qualities, they'll become more comfortable around you and get a better sense of your strengths. That often leads to more visible projects, raises and promotions. "Authenticity fosters common ground," Harris says.

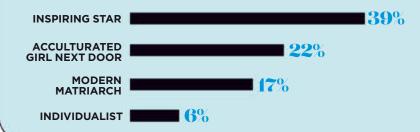
HOW WE THINK OTHERS VIEW US

AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF BLACK WOMEN WANT TO BE PERCEIVED AS UNTHREATENING CONFORMISTS IN THE OFFICE



HOW CEOS THINK OTHERS VIEW THEM

BLACK WOMEN IN THE C-SUITE WANT TO BE KNOWN FOR BEING RISK TAKERS WITH DISTINCT PERSONALITIES



BECOME AN INSPIRING STAR

Sharing more of your authentic self in the workplace can be challenging if you've been playing it safe, so take these baby steps to loosen up and get ahead:

PERSONALIZE YOUR SPACE. Your work area can say a lot about you. Bring in pictures of children, vacations or other memorable moments in your life. "Those become conversation pieces," Harris says. When colleagues ask about them, take the opportunity to share a personal story.

SET BOUNDARIES. Opening up to colleagues doesn't mean telling them about your latest breakup or relationship drama. "Determine in advance what

you're comfortable sharing," Harris says. Have preplanned topics of conversation, such as your kids' basketball games, a movie you saw or a favorite hobby.

INCORPORATE ELEMENTS OF YOUR PERSONAL STYLE. While your clothing and appearance should be in line with your job's culture, you should look for small ways to bring in aspects of your personality. If you prefer an Afrocentric look, consider accessories like an African print scarf or a "funky little pin you can put on your lapel," Harris suggests.

Tamara E. Holmes is a writer based in Washington, D.C.

Declare War on Dryness with Coconut & Monoi Deep Moisture Milk Soufflé

Hey **#teamnatural**, treat your tresses to a haven of hydration! **Design Essentials Natural Coconut & Monoi Deep Moisture Milk Soufflé** is expertly whipped with natural oils to infuse softness, moisture and restoration to parched strands. ESSENCE Insiders panel members tried it, and here's what they discovered.

DEEP MOISTURE MILK SOUFFLÉ

conquers dull, thirsty hair with these proven ingredients

- COCONUT deeply penetrates with essential moisture
- · MONOI soothes & restores
- SUNFLOWER protects & encourages growth
- SHEA seals with ultimate hydration



"The best part is that it's very moisturizing and melts in my hair to give it softness and shine."

- Larissa G.

"It made my hair shine... very pretty!! Also it made my hair easier to comb through and it was very soft...just the right moisture for my hair."

- Manette H.

"Of the five years since I've gone natural, this if the first product that has been most effective with keeping my hair moist. My curls were elongated and completely defined."

Dawn A.



OTOGRAPHY, MICHAEL ROWE. HAIR. MARCELLO COSTA USING JONATHAN PRODUC: BARBOZA.COM: MAKEUP, MERRELL HOLLIS USING MERRELL'S BEAUTY/KENBARBOZACO

THE BEAUTY GENIUS

As the lead innovation scientist for Burt's Bees, Abena Antwi whips up all-natural products that make our skin sing. We talked to the 37-year-old chemistry whiz and mom of two to find out what goes into creating the next best formula

ESSENCE: How did you get started in cosmetics?

BY TAMARA E. HOLMES

ABENA ANTWI: I started my major at Kean University in nursing; both of my parents were nurses. I changed to chemistry during my second year, thinking I would go into the pharmaceutical industry. One year, my chemistry teacher told me about a L'Oréal internship. The creativity and art behind the cosmetics industry attracted me. It wasn't just the chemistry that you learn in school, which is very structured.

ESSENCE: How did you turn your internship with L'Oréal into a job?

A.A.: It was supposed to be a threemonth program, but when I finished I asked if I could continue part-time while I was in school. So they gave me the opportunity. In my last year of college, L'Oréal acquired Kiehl's and they were looking for chemists. I got hired right before I graduated.

ESSENCE: How do you decide what trends to bring to consumers?

A.A.: My department forecasts what is going to be happening in the next five years. Say we're looking for new lipsticks. Once we have a concept, we test it with consumers to see how they buy that idea. Then I'll put that concept together and show the marketing team or go back to the consumer for more testing. If it works, we'll launch it. It takes two to three years to actually come up with the whole product.

ESSENCE: Are there many other female scientists in this field?

A.A.: You'd think that the cosmetics industry is full of women, but it's dominated by men. Trying to prove myself every day is a challenge as a woman of color. I'm tooting my own horn to make sure people know what I'm doing. If not, I'd just become another chemist in the lab. If

something I'm making comes out well, I don't even go to my manager. I'll head straight to upper management like, "This is what I have." They know every day what I'm working on or what is in the pipeline.

ESSENCE: What advice would you give to young women who want to work in STEM fields?

A.A.: Stay in school, keep studying, ask questions. A lot of women don't want to go into chemistry—it's very hard and intimidating. It wasn't a piece of cake for me, but I liked the challenge. I had a lot of mentors within the chemistry department. They had a big study group at my university, so there was always a group of people I could go to and ask questions. But what I do now is very different from what I learned in undergrad. I ended up getting my master's in cosmetic chemistry, which L'Oréal paid for.



66You'd think that the cosmetics industry is full of women, but it's dominated by men."

ESSENCE: What's next for you?

A.A.: I'm looking into writing about how natural products affect our skin for a trade publication in the skin care industry. I grew up in Ghana using shea butter and coconut oil on a day-to-day basis. People say, "Black don't crack." My grandmother was 100-and-something years old, but you wouldn't see one wrinkle on her body because of all the natural ingredients. I don't think there are a lot of studies out there that really talk about their benefits.

ESSENCE: What's your work mantra?

A.A.: "Have a good attitude about your work and passion for what you do." If you're just doing it for the money, I think that can get old very easily. I love what I do, and if I weren't here I'd be somewhere else doing exactly what I'm doing now.

Tamara E. Holmes is a writer in Washington, D.C.





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ADD A LITTLE RUNWAY FLAIR TO YOUR EVERYDAY FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS CRAYMER | STYLING BY ZOEY WASHINGTON













CREATING THE NEXT MUST-HAVE PRODUCT IS EASIER THAN YOU MIGHT THINK. ALL YOU NEED IS A GREAT IDEA AND THE DRIVE TO SEE IT THROUGH. STILL SKEPTICAL? TO PROVE IT, **ESSENCE** TALKED TO THREE INVENTORS TO FIND OUT WHAT IT TAKES TO TURN A SIMPLE CONCEPT INTO SALES GOLD by ERICKA SÓUTER | ILLUSTRATIONS BY CECILIA LUNDGREN

ver watch a commercial for a new product and ✓ think, I could have invented. that, or see sitting on store shelves a gadget that you thought up but didn't act on—years ago? Welcome to the club. There are thousands of aspiring entrepreneurs who are desperate to make their inventions happen, but just don't know how. So we partnered with "The Inventress" Lisa Ascolese, who has created wildly popular products sold on QVC and HSN, and who now helps others do the same.

Together, we've paired up-and-coming inventors with experienced mentors to walk them through everything from developing a prototype to brokering bigmoney deals with retailers. Check out their amazing journeys. We guarantee you'll be inspired.



TRACEY WASHINGTON BAGLEY, 52

THE IDEA: There is a certain terror that many mothers know all too well. It's that moment in the department store when you turn away for a split second and your child disappears. The next few minutes are filled with panic,

until you find him giggling beneath a clothing rack or hiding in a dressing room. Such experiences provided the inspiration for Bagley's **The Come Back Bracelet** (comebackbracelet .com). Worn by parent and child, the baubles have computer chips inside that operate like a GPS system. "If your little one wanders away more than ten feet, your bracelet blinks or vibrates," says the television producer, who has worked on numerous child safety stories. She was particularly struck by

the words of one dad whose daughter was snatched from a convenience store and later killed by her kidnapper. "He said to me, 'As a parent, don't ever let anyone make you feel bad about being overprotective,' "Bagley recalls." 'You can never be too careful.' "

WHAT SHE HAS DONE WELL: Though the basic idea is not new, Bagley's interpretation has an exciting twist: Rather than bulky, plastic, cheap-looking contraptions, the bracelets are stylish pieces of jewelry that any woman would want to wear. "It's a very gorgeous bracelet," gushes Ascolese, the founder of Inventing A-to-Z, a company that helps newbie inventors get their products off the ground. "We moms are fashion-forward ladies." Another bonus? Bagley is not going to have to spend a lot of money to get this made because the technology already exists.

WHAT'S HOLDING HER BACK: Balancing this project with her day job. "I work long hours coming up with stories, scheduling guests, doing pre-interviews and later overseeing the video editing," Bagley admits. As a result, she's not as far along as she could be (she is currently working on creating prototypes with a graphic artist). That's a common problem, warns her mentor, Shern Bonner, developer of the Jazzy Wrap, a best-selling hair cover that won't slide off during sleep. "The road from idea to market is a bumpy one," says Bonner. To keep things moving forward, the experts suggest dedicating at least 15 minutes a day to working on the product in some capacity.

TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL: Now Bonner says Bagley needs to protect her idea by getting it patented. "Shern has shown me how to do a lot of the legwork without paying the attorney's fees," says Bagley. That entails filing a patent and trademark at uspto.gov herself. Those cost

savings will come in handy when she starts manufacturing her bracelets. "This is going to be my legacy, what I am going to leave behind," says Bagley. "I may have won several awards for working in TV, but I'd like to be known for something that helps people, you know? Keeping kids safe is important to me."

BONNER'S WORDS OF WISDOM: "Don't defer your dreams. Most inventions take years to come to fruition. Have patience and the years of hard work launching the idea will pay off."





Stop-It-Stick

Furlow-Hearod

by Kathleen

KATHLEEN FURLOW-HEAROD, 42

THE IDEA: She had only taken her eyes off the road for a split second when the accident happened. Furlow-Hearod had dropped her cell between the seats, and like countless times before, she reached

down to get it. This time, she accidentally bumped the car in front of her as she fished out her phone. The other driver was enraged.

> "He was right to be upset," says Furlow-Hearod. "So from there. I decided I needed to do something to keep things from going between the seats." At first she experimented with an airplane neck pillow, but it was too short and bulky. What she envisioned, rather, was a long, padded device that she would nestle easily into the cracks. After nine months of trial and error, she developed the Stop-It-Stick (stopitstick

> > WHAT SHE HAS DONE WELL: As

she mocked up the design, Furlow-

lifesaving device.

.com), a simple but potentially

Hearod added other features, notes her mentor, Elaine Cato, whose Backless Bra creation earned her first runner-up on the reality TV show American Inventor. Not only does the Stop-It-Stick keep your phone, keys and other items in check, but it's also bendable, with a flashlight that has an emergency blinker mode, so it can be set up on the road to warn of car trouble. Just as important is Furlow-Hearod's manufacturing plan. "Companies used to require a large quantity of product before they were even interested in you," Furlow-Hearod explains. These days, retailers don't want to risk being saddled with thousands of units they aren't positive they can sell. As such, Furlow-Hearod uses a manufacturer that can provide smaller,

customizable numbers. "Unless you have a product that is in great demand, I would suggest that ordering just what you need

is the way to go so that you don't lose your shirt," says Ascolese.

WHAT'S HOLDING HER BACK: "A serious lack of funds," laments Furlow-Hearod, a hairdresser by trade. "A lot of your money goes to trial and error, advertising, giving out free product. I've used my savings to invest in this and there are nights I went to bed crying not knowing where my next \$2 was going. to come from." Indeed, that million-dollar idea can bankrupt you. "Many inventors go to family, close friends, venture capitalists and online funding sites for start-ups and also apply for small-business grants or loans," says Cato. "Prepare yourself for a lot of nos, but being an inventor is all about taking risk. You have to be diligent and just ask." Consider raising capital online through sites like kickstarter.com and crowd funding.com. Adds Cato, "Attending events where you can solicit investors is also a good idea. Try to get them interested, and ask whomever you speak with to help get the word out."

TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL: Furlow-Hearod had her heart set on selling the Stop-It-Stick on QVC, but they already had something similar. She needs to think bigger when it comes to her target retailers. "I teach my clients not to have tunnel vision," says Ascolese, "See it everywhere, See it in Walgreens, Costco not just QVC. These inventors will have a warehouse full of product and sit on it waiting for that dream retailer to come to them."

For her part, Furlow-Hearod is determined to stay positive. "As I've read story after story of successful people in any genre, they have suffered," she says. "I've been broke, scared and homeless since I started this project. I almost felt like giving up. But when you start making your dream come true, it's hard to turn away. It's a part of you. It's pulling at you every day."

CATO'S WORDS OF WISDOM: "Most people in our lives will not fully understand our efforts, so don't take it to heart when they say you are wasting your time. Continue to self-promote and be your own biggest cheerleader. Kathleen is establishing relationships with buyers for distribution. She has a great pitch and is optimistic for product placement very soon. We also discussed working with a PR person for more exposure. Bottom line: Any minor progress deserves a pat on the back."



DAISY CURBEON, 49

THE IDEA: When it comes to beauty, celebrity stylist Curbeon knows one thing: "The biggest worry women have is their hair," she says. "It's their crowning glory, and if their hair is not right, they are not happy." In her 20 years in the business, Curbeon has cre-

ated hundreds of custom-made wigs for clients, but she wanted to put a new spin on the traditional hairpiece. Guided by the simple philosophy that women like to change things up, she crafted Daisy Curbeon PineApple & Bangs (daisycurbeon.com).

WHAT SHE HAS DONE WELL: She's managed to create a hair accessory that doesn't already exist. "You don't have to sit for hours and have your hair braided and sewn in," Curbeon says. "And there is no glue or clips that will break or damage the hair. Plus, it's easy. You just put it on and go."

The first option in her "hair wardrobe" is a reversible ponytail that can morph into a chignon, side bun, messy bun, top knot or voluminous bun. The second is a removable bang that can be used in the front or added to the nape of your neck to give a bob a boost and add highlights, fullness and length.

"The way she designed her bangs and her updos is very clever," says her mentor Ascolese. "They're well made and she

> put her heart and soul into it, so I think she's going to have an easy time selling it." Also, Curbeon was so passionate about her product that she zoomed through the process: She came up with a

> > one-of-a-kind idea that women need, created samples, manufactured them, designed the packaging and filmed a video highlighting what makes her product so special. Her invention is ready to hit stores.



what's holding her back: At this point, the only thing getting in Curbeon's way is Curbeon herself. There were times she would obsess over things, making multiple, unnecessary tweaks. "Sometimes people get stuck and instead of taking what is in front of them, they modify and change," says Ascolese. "Her product is great, but she's stuck. Trying to make it perfect, you never get it out. We are ready to pitch her to QVC, Costco, Sally Beauty Supply—she's ready."

TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL:

Curbeon now needs to pitch to retailers and secure investors. "Daisy's on the cusp of the breakthrough," says Ascolese. "It's very important to show the investor how much you have invested in your own product. They like to see that you have put up your own funds. If you haven't, they are not likely to invest in you. I would also say keep good records of all the money you have put in, from a needle and thread all the way to whatever manufacturing you have in place."

ASCOLESE'S WORDS OF WISDOM:

"Sometimes the biggest thing holding inventors back is a fear of failure. They don't realize how successful their product can be if they just step out on faith."



THE INVENTRESS

When most other little girls were preoccupied with dolls, Lisa Ascolese was obsessed with inventing things. "At 9 years old, I was making my own shoelaces because I didn't want to tie them," she laughs. "I glued them together. I think that's a quick indication of what the

future would hold for me." Indeed it was. By age 12, Ascolese had a thriving business selling homemade hair wraps, key chains and necklaces. Changing and modifying things to fit her needs—and those of everyone around her—was second nature.

"When it came time for college, I knew I wanted to design and develop products," she says. "I wanted to be an inventor, but there was no school for inventing. Of course there was marketing and all that, but I hadn't put the two together. What I did was seek out some manufacturers. I looked for a patent attorney—the same attorney I have 25 years later. And I just started putting these things together, instinctively. I started doing this all on my own, stepping and falling and picking myself up, making lots and lots of mistakes and finding my way through the terrain."

For Ascolese, necessity has been the mother of invention. Her wildly popular Bosom Buddy nursing cape was the result of trepidation about breast-feeding her baby in public. "So I'm thinking, Jeez, there are hundreds of thousands of other women like me with the same issue, nervous about breast-feeding. That's the time where you want to be able to develop that maternal relationship with your baby," she says. "Women went crazy for it."

Ascolese launched her second invention, the Bun-Tie, on QVC after landing a meeting with execs at the network. The key to her continued success has been "keeping my foot in the door," she reveals. "Buyers come and go, but it's about relationship-building. That's a big thing for me." Now with several popular products under her belt, she has come up with yet another must-have. "I started power walking and needed a place to keep my phone and credit cards," she says. "So I started designing what I call the Cinche. It's a multipocket slimming garment that can be worn as a top, an undergarment, a skirt or a sash.

"Most products come out of a need," she continues. "During the course of your day, you find ways to add to or change something you use. Think about your life and what would make it easier. That is how inventions are born."

STEPS TO BECOMING AN INVENTOR GOT DREAMS OF BEING ON SHARK TANK? FOLLOW THESE STEPS TO LAUNCH YOUR KILLER PRODUCT

I BRAINSTORM YOUR IDEA. If you need it, other people likely need it, too. Run your product idea by your friends and family. If they are as enthusiastic as you are, then go for it.

2 PERFECT THE PROTOTYPE. "An inventor should always try to make her own prototype, so that when she is sending it to a manufacturer, it's easy to visualize what she has in mind," Ascolese advises.

3 APPLY FOR A TRADEMARK AND A PATENT. This is a must if you want to protect your idea. To save money, consider filing the paperwork yourself at uspto.gov/patents/process/file.

1 FUND YOUR DREAM. "The first source you should consider is your family," suggests Ascolese. "If you have a family with a good business sense, include them in your business and put together a contract. Make each person in your family a member of your business. Each relative should be able to gain revenue based on how much money they have invested in your company." However, if your family cannot invest or is not willing to do so, look into a small-business loan through your state or your local bank.

5 GET IT MADE. To find a good manufacturer, pay close attention to four things: the quality of previous products; how promptly they return your calls and

e-mails; how well they make your first sample; and whether they deliver your product to you within the agreed-upon time frame.

6 PREP THE PITCH. You will need to become a good salesman to seal the deal with a big retailer. Develop a clean PowerPoint presentation with three bullet points that tell your story and make a video showcasing your product. "Make whatever products you have dance," says Ascolese. "You put the fancy shoes on that bad boy and the prettiest dress and you work it!" □

Ericka Souter is a New York City-based writer, editor and author.





If you encounter a wrong, fight until you make it right!"

-REP. FREDERICA WILSON



AGE: 68 YEARS IN OFFICE: 1

Key issue: Women's equality, making sure we get the same consideration as men in terms of pay. Stress reliever: The

Bible tells you to go in your quiet corner, and I find that wherever I am.



YEARS IN OFFICE: 4

Key issue: Transforming the nation's foster care system.

Personal motivation:

I feel a responsibility to continue the struggle of those who came before me

Inspiration: Young people.



AGE: 65

YEARS IN OFFICE: 2

Key issue: My anti-child sex trafficking legislation.

Why politics?: I grew up during the Civil Rights Movement...and

knew I wanted to make my community better. Stress reliever: Boating

with my husband.



AGE: 68

YEARS IN OFFICE: 22

Key issue: Overcoming economic, employment and educational inequality for Black female veterans. Work mantra: "A lot of people talk about it, but I make it happen. If you work long enough, you can aet it done."



AGE: 50

YEARS IN OFFICE: 8

Key issue: "Improving border security and expediting the processing of unaccompanied children before immigration judges. We have a responsibility to demonstrate compassion toward these children." —Clarke, to Brooklyn Daily Eagle.



YEARS IN OFFICE: <1

Why politics?: I recognized early on that the decisions that are made at any elected level impact everything from your quality of life to your access to opportunities.

Work mantra: "To whom much is given, much is expected."



AGE: 56

YEARS IN OFFICE: 8

Key issue: Child care for working families.

Biggest challenge for

female politicians: Believing we can do it. You have to ask a woman to run for office seven or eight times before she says yes. With guys, you ask once and they're in.



AGE: 62

YEARS IN OFFICE: 8

Key issue: Amending No Child Left Behind.

Proudest career moment:

One of the first bills I got passed was to make September Childhood Obesity Awareness Month, We need to take a look at how to become healthier people.



AGE: 79

YEARS IN OFFICE: 22 Biggest challenge for

female politicians: Gender bias, which we seem to

experience most often when raising campaign funds. **Inspiration:** Harriet

Tubman was a quiet woman who knew how to get things done.



AGE: 59

YEARS IN OFFICE: 2

Key issue: Expanding economic development. Work mantra: "At the

end of the day, you should be able to look at yourself in the mirror and still recognize the person in the reflection."



AGE: 60

YEARS IN OFFICE: <1

Key issue: Increasing and funding technical education for young people.

Work mantra: "Don't ever believe you are better than anyone else, and don't ever believe anyone else is better than you."



AGE: 64 YEARS IN OFFICE: 10

Key issue: Helping working families lift themselves out of poverty. Boosting job growth and development.

Proudest career moment:

I led the charge in passing the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act in 2013.



AGE: 76 YEARS IN OFFICE: 24

Key issue: Tackling the wealth disparity between Blacks and Whites.

Stress reliever: I put on Coltrane, Miles, B.B. King.

Go-to career advice: Don't ever forget from which you've come. Be true to who you are.



AGE: 68

YEARS IN OFFICE: 16

Key issue: Eliminating

Inspiration: Organizing Shirley Chisholm's northern California presidential primary. When I ran for public office, she came back and helped me campaign.



AGE: 77

YEARS IN OFFICE: 24

Key issue: Getting statehood for my constituents, who pay the highest taxes per capita in the U.S.

On work-life balance:

Home life will be sacrificed unless you put the same planning into it as you do into work.



AGE: 65

YEARS IN OFFICE: 20

Key issue: Giving everybody an unfettered right to vote. The inability of the Voting Rights Act to be enforced is diminishing democracy.

Go-to career advice:

Be everyone's best friend.



AGE: 48

YEARS IN OFFICE: <1

Key issue: We are in a severe economic crisis, so I'm trying to bring parity with the mainland.

Favorite book: Because of Roots I wanted to be a cultural anthropologist to understand how other people live.



AGE: 39

YEARS IN OFFICE: <1

Key issue: Tackling the current, out-of-control government spending.

Work mantra: "Don't inhale the adulation you get. Stay grounded."

Stress reliever: I go for a

long run.



AGE: 50

YEARS IN OFFICE: 4

Key issue: My district is the poorest in the state, so my main priority is creating more jobs.

Go-to career advice: My mom told me that I must define myself for myself. If I don't, society will make assumptions about me.



AGE: 72

YEARS IN OFFICE: 4

Key issue: Ending the school-to-prison pipeline.

Work mantra: When I was a principal, I took on the mafia to close a garbage plant across the street from my school: "If you encounter a wrong, fight until you make it right!" □



I feel a responsibility to continue the struggle of those who came before me."

-REP. KAREN BASS

DEFINSE MODE

TRAINING PUBLIC DEFENDERS TO DO AN OPTIMUM JOB OF REPRESENTING THE POOR AND UNDERSERVED IS THE MISSION BEHIND A GROUNDBREAKING CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM PROGRAM BY KATTI GRAY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMIE HOPPER

hen two Atlanta police officers accused Quavius Glover, 22, of trying to mow them down in a vehicle in June 2013, public defender Zanele Ngubeni knew she had her work cut out for her. "Unfortunately, the face of the criminal justice system has become the face of the young Black male," says Ngubeni, 32. "But we have to be careful not to look at young Black males and stereotype all of them. My client wears locs; he's got several colors of dye in his hair. He likes jewelry. But when you listen to him, you realize he's a young man worth listening to."

Ngubeni and Glover were able to find Instagram and other social media photos of another person fitting police descriptions of the car's driver—someone who was in the vicinity during the crime and who looked a lot like Glover. Additionally, Glover used a transit card to ride the subway near the time of the alleged attack; computerized records helped his defense.

Ngubeni is one of thousands of public defenders—government-funded lawyers assigned to a case when a defendant can't afford to hire a private attorney. Following the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark 1963 ruling in favor of Clarence Gideon—a poor White man from Florida who, while on trial for burglary, claimed that he had a constitutional right to legal counsel that was financed by the government—public defense offices sprang up throughout the country. The offices have long tended to be short-staffed, underfunded and overloaded with criminal cases. And in some instances, say critics, public defenders themselves have been blatantly disdainful of the impoverished clients they're paid to represent.

But Ngubeni isn't just any public defender—she's a Gideonite, trained by criminal justice reform organization

Gideon's Promise, which counsels public defenders on how to represent their clients adequately and fairly in courtrooms, where prosecutors tend to dominate. "Gideon's Promise affirms me," Ngubeni says. "It means the world to me."

THE MISSION

Gideon's Promise, launched in 2007, is the brainchild of Jonathan Rapping, a winner of the coveted MacArthur Foundation Fellow Program's "Genius Grant," who honed his own public defender skills while working on behalf of poor defendants in Washington, D.C. The program seeks to cultivate a nationwide network of public defenders who are as compassionate as they are justice-minded; who have the legal tools necessary for granting clients a top-notch defense; and who can increase the likelihood that poor people get the same courtroom and jailhouse treatment as the criminally accused who are more well off.

"It's not that no one should ever be punished," says Rapping, 48. "But we should see some humanity in this process.... As soon as we make exceptions about who should be humanized and who shouldn't, the poor and communities of color end up bearing the brunt.... Let's be fair."

The organization is also working to dispel notions that public defenders are inferior. The fact that these attorneys tend to earn considerably less than private lawyers has fueled some views that a public defender is the least desirable option. "There's a perception that only a paid [private] lawyer is a real lawyer. So public defenders get a bad rap because they are not [thought of as actually being] paid," says Ilham Askia, the organization's executive director and Rapping's wife.

In 2012, Askia, 38, left her schoolteacher gig to join Gideon's Promise, where she oversees fund-raising, staff development, conferences and training sessions for ▷





Gideon's lawyers, and more. She was driven to join by two things: the Black students she'd taught, who hailed from neighborhoods disproportionately beset by crime and the kind of policing that put people in those communities at risk for incarceration; and her personal experience.

When Askia was 5—years after her father had given up a life of crime to become a devout Muslim and business owner—police in her hometown of Buffalo arrested her dad on an old armed robbery warrant.

which, in turn, led to his conviction and ten-year prison sentence. Her father's public defender, as best as Askia's family could determine, did little to show that her dad was a changed man. That her father did an about-face is the type of biographical detail that might result in a person doing court-ordered community service instead of prison time. This is why, Askia says, the work of Gideon's Promise is so crucial.

BREAKING THE CHAIN

At a January 2015 semiannual conference, Askia and Rapping worked with 60 young lawyers—the latest and the largest single crop of attorneys in the group's history—as well as 160 other public defenders from the Gideon community. The class of 60 will attend conferences and training

strategy; how not to be undone by the stresses of the job. They brainstorm over cases the young attorneys are currently handling in far-flung locales: Phoenix; Jackson, Mississippi; Pittsburgh; El Paso, Texas; and elsewhere. Training sessions become bonding rituals where the attorneys vent and also herald particularly salient victories.

As soon as we make exceptions about who should be humanized and who shouldn't, the poor and communities of color end up bearing the brunt.... Let's be fair.

-JONATHAN RAPPING

sessions over a three-year period, culminating in their certification as full-fledged Gideonites.

During training, seasoned lawyers, social workers and crime investigators from public defender offices, and, sometimes, former defendants, instruct trainees on a variety of topics: how to challenge forensics of drug cases and defendant confessions; how to use technology to build a defense

"I have tried five felony cases since March [2014]. And I have won four of the five," Alisha Marie Scott, 30, an assistant public defender in Fayette County, Georgia,

says during a discussion. The conference room erupts in whoops and hollers.

And there was this retelling by Elliott Brown, a 31-year-old Lafayette, Louisiana-based public defender: One of his clients was a woman whose boyfriend held a gun to her head and forced her to help him commit a robbery. She was facing five criminal charges, which, collectively, carried a 396-year prison sentence. Brown was

able to work out a plea agreement, however, and his client will be on probation for five years. "Mr. Elliott, I want to thank you," Brown says, echoing what she told him. "My 5-year-old son's about to get off the bus and I'm about to hug him for the

first time in 20 months." The room erupted again.

Another case that shows just what public defenders are up against is that of a Decatur, Georgia, woman named Sheila Joshua. One evening in October 2013, a male companion of Joshua's entered her

evening in October 2013, a male companion of Joshua's entered her home in a drunken fit. "He wanted to fight me. I wanted to leave the house," Joshua tells ESSENCE. An altercation ensued, and the man called the police. Once officers arrived, they concluded that Joshua had cut him with a pair of scissors they retrieved from the bathroom where the scuffle had occurred. "It was not a weapon," Joshua says. "And I still stand on that fact." The officers arrested Joshua nevertheless.

A prosecutor from the local district attorney's office gave Joshua two choices: Be tried for aggravated assault and, if convicted, face one to 20 years in prison. Or she could plead guilty, accept a plea bargain and be sentenced to five years probation. Probation would have required Joshua, an unemployed food service worker, to pay almost \$60 per week to attend violence prevention classes for six months, among other things. If she violated any of the terms, she'd end up in prison.

Joshua, afraid that she wouldn't meet those conditions, was leaning toward going to trial. "She was torn about what to do, and just afraid," says Ben Githieya, 37, Joshua's public defender and a Gideonite. "It was my job to try to help her think clearly, to think beyond that moment, at a time when the prosecutor was not letting up."

Githieya knew that there was no firm proof that Joshua had cut the man

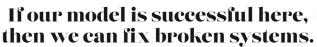
with the pair of scissors. Armed with nothing more than flimsy evidence against Joshua—who heeded Githieya's advice not to plea bargain—the prosecutor relented and dropped the charges more than a year after Joshua's arrest.

Meanwhile, the Deep South remains a focal point for the group. "We could easily have opened a Gideon's Promise on the West Coast. But the South? This is the mecca," Askia says. "There is still such a concentration of violated civil rights and problems with the

criminal justice system. If our model is successful here, then we can fix broken systems

in Washington State, in Maryland, in South Dakota…everywhere." □

Katti Gray is a journalist specializing in education, health and criminal justice news.



-ILHAM ASKIA

Standing your ground against a bullying prosecutor is key for public defenders who aim to ensure their clients' fair treatment in court. It's a skill hundreds of public defenders

have honed, in part, through Gideon's Promise.

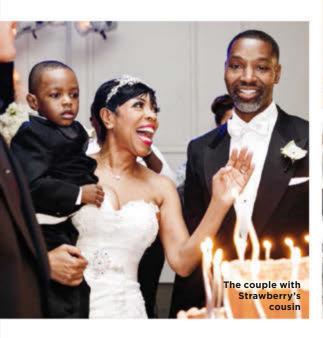
FULFILLING THE PROMISE

Next on the agenda for Gideon's Promise: adding to the current roster of 32 county-level public defender offices and 19 law schools that follow the organization's model. Rapping, Askia, their staffers and affiliated professionals will be training the public defender agency in Maryland, the first state system to partner with the organization by adopting its mission and model.



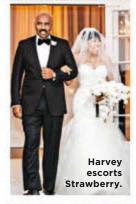


SEX & SEX &













very week *The Steve Harvey Morning Show* cohost and our go-to girlfriend Shirley Strawberry offers no-nonsense relationship tips to the show's millions of listeners, who share their drama for the "Strawberry Letter" segment. A few years ago, the divorcée realized it was time to take her own advice.

Strawberry was thriving with more than 25 years in broadcast, a hit show and an NAACP Image Award-winning book when she realized she had not seriously dated anyone in more than five years. "I wanted a relationship, but

I wasn't putting any effort into it and made no room in my life for a man," she recalls. "I had faith that God was going to send me a man, but what was I doing? You can't go home every weekend and just sit there. You have to put yourself in the game. Faith without works is dead."

Strawberry decided to put more energy into her personal happiness and peace of mind. She started eating better and working out, which helped her lose some weight. She strengthened her relationship with God through prayer, bought more figure-flattering dresses and scaled back on the big earrings to better showcase her natural beauty: "I learned to not only love but also like who I saw in the mirror, and I became more vocal about my desires and feelings."

With a commitment to keeping a smile on her face, she found herself open to trying new things—including being

introduced to a man whom a friend had wanted her to meet. One day in 2013, the girlfriend took Strawberry by the concierge business of Atlanta entrepreneur Ernesto Williams. As he and Strawberry began to chat, the friend made a hasty excuse and left them on their own. The usually guarded Strawberry started to open up as they both shared their pasts and hopes for the future. Williams arranged for one of his company's drivers to take Strawberry home and asked her on an official date. Days after, the couple quickly bonded and spent hours

You have to put yourself in the game. Faith without works is dead.

—SHIRLEY STRAWBERRY

talking and people-watching in Atlanta's Piedmont Park. "He was a complete gentleman from the beginning," she says. "He's handsome but most important he was honest and kind." Strawberry let him know up front she wasn't in the market just to be a girlfriend. "There was a time I would never have said that and would have been afraid to say how I feel," she says. "Men say what they want all the time, so as women, we have to step up and say what we want. You just might get it."

Eventually Strawberry introduced Williams to her daughter, Sheridyn, a senior in high school. "She loved him instantly," the mother recalls. Last summer Sheridyn joined forces with her mom's beau for a special birthday surprise for Strawberry—a marriage proposal live on the radio show. "It was such a shock, and so romantic," Strawberry says. "You never know what God has in store for you."

Williams shared that he wanted to celebrate his upcoming fiftieth birthday in a big way, and that included gaining a wife. The couple set their wedding date for his milestone, January 9, 2015.

"What attracted me to Shirley was her positive energy," Williams says. "It was so

> strong I had to humble myself as a man to allow God to speak to me through this incredible woman."

> The couple's black-and-white Friday-night wedding was planned by Tony Conway and overflowed with love. Strawberry was escorted down the aisle by her mentor, Steve Harvey. She wore

never-used white satin shoes that she had bought more than ten years ago when her first marriage was ending. "I thought, I'm just going to buy these shoes for my next wedding," she recalls. "My friend added some bling to them for my special day." After the "I dos," Kem sang his hit song "Share My Life" for the couple's first dance, and the pair toasted their love with family and friends. The following Monday morning, Strawberry was back on the radio helping listeners with their relationships. "When you make room for love, you discover you have more than enough space," Strawberry says. \square









HEALTHY &

HEALTHY & HAPPY · MENTAL HEALTH

"It looked like I was doing well, but inside I was dying." As she sank deeper into depression, she spent all day in bed. "I stayed under the covers until it was time to get my daughter from school," she recalls. One day last spring, she put on her shoes and began walking from her apartment to the Brooklyn Bridge. "I wanted to jump off but my heart said no," Alleyne-Morris says. As she debated her life and death, she collapsed to the ground sobbing. It was then she listened to voice mails from her husband. Hearing his voice and her daughter's made her go home. Realizing this was serious, Alleyne-Morris turned to her church and a therapist.

As Black women, we are caretakers for everyone from partners to parents to children to coworkers. We'll see a dentist for a toothache or our physician about a cough, but what gets lost in the hustle is our emotional well-being. We bear and bury sadness and hopelessness without a word to a professional or our nearest and dearest. This silent struggle can be devastating, as evidenced by the suspected suicide of Karyn Washington, creator of the For Brown Girls blog and #DarkSkinRedLip Project, and other recent high-profile cases.

There is still a stigma attached to mental health issues, despite the reality that almost 7 percent of Americans are affected by depression. African-Americans are less likely to get help, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

It's time Black women begin to put ourselves first. "A lot of Black women were taught that prioritizing yourself is selfish, but that's a lie," says Ericka Jenifer, Ph.D., a psychologist in Washington, D.C. "You have to care for yourself to care for others."

Exam Step #1: TAKE YOUR EMOTIONAL TEMPERATURE

The first move toward good emotional health is to assess your mental state regularly. That way you'll be more aware when things get off track. "Everybody feels down sometimes," says Jenifer. The key is recognizing when that feeling is frequent.

The classic signs of depression that mental health experts look for are sleeping more than you need to or less than you usually do, changes in appetite, an inability to relax, increased irritability, and a loss of interest in activities that used to give you pleasure. "If you feel your joy has faded, your spirit is out of sync and you lack energy you used to have, monitor that," says Jenifer. "If symptoms persist for weeks, it may be depression."

A less obvious red flag is an increased reliance on retail therapy, alcohol, drugs or sex to improve your mood, says Joy Harden Bradford, Ph.D., an Atlanta psychologist and founder of therapyforblackgirls.com. "If you used to get one drink at happy hour and now have three, or you're hooking up with a different guy each week, investigate these changes," she says.

In addition to behavioral changes, depression can also make you prone to physical problems. "In my experience Black women come in with somatic symptoms such as persistent headaches, backaches and stomach pain," says Bradford. "It's more acceptable to see a physician and say, 'I'm having migraines,' than it is to go to a therapist because you're feeling anxious or sad."

Emotional lows can also happen when we're riding high, as Alleyne-Morris discovered. "Happy events are still stressful,"



Bradford points out. "Marriage, pregnancy, moving and changing jobs are among the top stressors." And stress can negatively affect your mood.

Exam Step #2: SEEK HELP

Once you've identified that your mental state isn't as good as it should be, you need to act. Jenifer suggests practicing what she calls "psychological first aid." "Talk to friends, family or your pastor," she says. Doing this and adjusting your routine—exercising more consistently, eating more healthfully and improving your sleep habits—may be enough to get you back on track. "[But] if these basics aren't working, talk to a professional," says Jenifer.

To find a therapist, ask your primary physician or your health care provider for a referral, or search online for professionals in your area. Also check if your company offers an employee assistance program (EAP), which provides free, short-term counseling and referrals for more intensive treatment. "Crisis hotlines are another resource," says Jenifer. "The majority of the calls they take are people who are sad and upset and who need to talk. They can share resources in your community."

Ensuring your therapist is right for you can require time and effort. "Choosing one is like finding a good pair of shoes," says Jenifer. "You may tell this person your most intimate secrets, so it's got to fit." If you'd prefer a therapist who is culturally in tune, check out The Association of Black Psychologists (abpsi.org). "I encourage people to be active participants in their treatment," adds Jenifer. That means letting the therapist know if you're uncomfortable with the approach or questions.

Exam Step #3: FIND PEACE

A year after hitting her lowest point, Alleyne-Morris is counting her blessings. She shut down the beloved blog that drove her to despair and now concentrates on her loved ones and herself. "I make time to connect with friends at least twice a week," she says. "I go to the movies alone, something I had never done." Alleyne-Morris also keeps a blessings book, where she writes down things she is grateful for daily. "If I feel down, I'll read my book," she says. "I'm happy and fully living my life."



TESTING 1, 2, 3

ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD AND STRESS LESS OVER RAMPANT STATE ASSESSMENTS BY YLONDA GAULT CAVINESS

om of two Krista Weaver can tell when standardized testing is set to ramp up at her daughters' schools. Zoe Grace, 14, has acne breakouts brought on by anxiety. That's why Weaver was particularly vexed when a new exam was recently added: Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC, will be required for students as early as kindergarten in about a dozen states.

"Really? How about we not launch into college testing for 8-year-olds?" says Weaver, who lives in the Chicago suburb of Homewood "How about we first build a solid foundation instead of going test crazy?"

Parents and teachers across the country are asking the same question. In fact, the U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, concedes that the battery of exams children face today—largely a result of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002—threatens to suck the life out of learning. Some kids now take an estimated 113 standardized tests between the pre-K level and twelfth grade, according to data collected from the Council of the Great City Schools. Parents and districts are fighting backorganizing efforts to repeal or boycott

the rising assessment tide. For now, you can't make state assessments go away. But these tips will help you stay informed so you can best speak up for your youngster.

Educate yourself.

Different school districts have different standards and exam schedules—even within the same state. For example. urban neighborhoods with a lot of underperforming schools sometimes administer far more tests than more affluent ones. Determine what your child is up against. Your local school superintendent should make such information available. You can also visit pta.org for details. "Our guides will help support families so parents can get more involved," says Otha Thornton, president of the organization.

Chart the course.

Find out, as early as possible, when testing is scheduled in your little one's school. Then plan around those periods—limiting or cutting out her after-school activities and appointments so she won't feel undue pressure. Many schools begin statewide standardized assessments between March and May.

Manage your anxiety first.

It's scary to think that your youngster's future could hinge on a single day of testing. What if he simply doesn't test well, or she woke up feeling sick? Fairly or unfairly, many of these exams are designed to measure the competency of teachers and curricula—not students. Read up on the trend. The Test: Why Our Schools Are Obsessed With Standardized Testing—but You Don't Have to Be (PublicAffairs) by Anya Kamenetz helps to demystify the process.

Know your child.

Does testing upset him? Talk about it. Try to allay his fears. Well before exam day, help your little one prepare by working with her teacher to get supplemental practice guides. Most important, be sure to monitor your own attitude so she doesn't internalize additional angst or frustration.

Tap your inner activist.

Do your research to learn your options. If you think the number of standardized exams is excessive and could therefore be harmful to your child, you have the right to ask your district to provide evidence that certain tests are worthwhile. Exam results from previous years are also open to public inquiry.

Consider saying no.

There's a growing backlash across the country against standardized testing. "In most states parents aren't mandated by law to have their children tested," says Monty Neill, executive director of FairTest. Last year thousands of students skipped out on exams. Students opting out of tests can face disciplinary action, including suspension and denial of grade promotion. Check your state's policy on consequences for declining tests. You can learn more from groups fighting highstakes assessments, including fairtest.org, unitedoptout.com and the Grassroots Education Movement (gemnyc.org).

Ylonda Gault Caviness is the author of the upcoming book Child, Please: How Mama's Old-School Lessons Helped Me Check Myself Before I Wrecked Myself (Tarcher).



EASY EASTER BRUNCH

GIVE THANKS WITH A FABULOUS MEAL FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

BY BRITTNEY OLIVER

aroline Randall Williams remembers the Easter mornings of her youth, when loved ones searched the yard for bright plastic eggs filled with scriptures and poetry by Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks and her great-grandfather Arna Bontemps. For her mother, Alice Randall, Easter was a big day in her grandmother's Detroit home in the sixties. With their new cookbook, Soul Food Love: Healthy Recipes Inspired by One Hundred Years of Cooking in a Black Family (Clarkson Potter), the mother and daughter tell their family's journey of cooking through four generations of women with remixes of passed-down recipes.

Easter is a busy day for women as we prepare our households to host guests, get ready for church and organize activities. "I have actually missed church because of cooking," Randall admits. "One year I was preparing an artisanal ham. It was so big I didn't want to leave it in the oven, so my family left without me. That's not what this is about." She's since learned the power of scheduling ahead and serving cold meats like salmon.

Here are a few more of the duo's tried-and-true habits for a soulful Easter brunch that's easy, affordable and healthful:







ahead of

avoid stress.

time to

"As a single mom, I multiused eggs. After creating Easter quiche, use shells for decoration." - ALICE RANDALL

Plan Ahead

Prep your meal the day before and reheat items for brunch. "You can marinate lamb days in advance, then throw it in the oven before church and come back to a finished meal," shares Randall Williams

Be a Chef With Style

Buy an apron you love, to avoid staining your Sunday best. "I didn't know I was holding in stress while cooking until I got my apron," Randall Williams says.

Keep an Eye on **Your Waistline**

Make a menu and check it twice. "Do you really need the extra starch? Instead of potatoes and rice, put one more vegetable and one less starch," Randall says. "Also, have brunch right after church to allow time to clean up and go on a group stroll in the neighborhood."

Use Food as Decor

In the spirit of Alice's grandmother's outdoor Easter brunches, the ladies include earthy table settings. "We've used green and yellow peppers as soup bowls. Cut off the top, spoon out the middle and add your soup," Randall Williams says. "Use carrots to hold place cards by slicing each to make a slit, then putting a card in it. You can write names with a paint pen."

Don't go into debt over a

I multiused eggs," Randall recalls. "After creating an Easter quiche, you can blow out eggs and dye the shells for decoration."

Women Cooking Playlist

"Family Affair" and "Kitchen"

by Mary J. Blige

"Come On in My Kitchen"

by Robert Johnson "Proud Mary"

by Tina Turner

"Family Business" by Kanye West

"Oh Happy Day" by The St. Francis

Choir feat. Ryan Toby (Sister Act 2)

Spend Smart

meal. "As a single mom,



BENEFITING





PLATINUM

aetna

BORDEÄÜX 13





SUPPORTING PARTNER



MEDIA



















WHERE TO BUY

COVER

On Kelly Rowland: **Anna**Demeulemeester tank, \$495, barneys
.com. **Lorraine Schwartz** necklace*,
Bergdorf Goodman, NYC, 212-8728757. On Tim Weatherspoon: **Basic**NY shirt, \$75, basic-ny.com. On baby
Titan: **Petit Trésor** onesie, \$59, petit tresor.com.

CONTENTS

Page 9: Cynthia Rowley tunic, \$195, and pants, \$225, Cynthia Rowley stores. Third Crown ring, \$280, third crown.com. Gianvito Rossi pumps, \$730, netaporter.com.

Page 10: All clothing, stylist's own.

TO THE MAX

Page 39: Charlotte Ronson romper, \$750, similar styles available at blueandcream.com.

Page 40: Diego Binetti top, \$350, Little Black Dress, Tiburon, California, 415-789-8925.

Page 42: Byron Lars Beauty Mark rugby shirt, \$395, shop.byronlars beautymark.com.

OH BABY!

Page 46-47: On Kelly Rowland: Nina Ricci shirt*, select Barneys New York stores. Marni X Marni necklace*, LiMar Jewels, NYC, 212-219-0407. Lorraine Schwartz necklaces*, Bergdorf Goodman, NYC, 212-872-8757. On Tim Weatherspoon: Maison Margiela sweater, \$850, maisonmartinmargiela.com. On baby Titan: Petit Trésor onesie, \$179, petit tresor.com.

Page 48: On Kelly: **Roberto Cavalli** gown*, saksfifthavenue.com.

gown*, saksfifthavenue.com.

Lorraine Schwartz necklace and cuff*, Bergdorf Goodman, NYC, 212-872-8757. Rings, subject's own. On Tim: Lanvin suit, \$2,500, barneys.com. Shirt, watch, ring and sneakers, subject's own. On baby Titan: Skip Hop onesie, \$39, Kitson, Los Angeles, 310-657-0450. Furnishings: (Left column, middle photo, from left) West Elm Bubble Knit pillow cover, \$44, Chevron pillow cover, \$39, and standard

pillow insert, \$12, westelm.com. Kate Spade twin sheet set, \$79, and standard pillowcase, \$29 for set of 2, westelm.com. Serena & Lily pouf, \$495, serenaandlily.com. The Land of Nod teepee, \$159, and baby quilt, \$99, landofnod.com. Serena & Lily crib bumper, \$115, and crib sheet, \$36, serenaandlily .com. (Right column, third photo from top) Jean-Michel Basquiat candle, \$60, momastore.org. Page 51: On Kelly: Mason bustier with skirt, \$450, saksfifthavenue .com. Marni X Marni name necklace*, LiMar Jewels, NYC, 212-219-0407. Lorraine Schwartz necklaces*, Bergdorf Goodman, NYC, 212-872-8757. On Tim: Maison Margiela shirt, \$150, maisonmartinmargiela.com. Watch, subject's own. On baby Titan: Petit Trésor onesie, \$350, Petit Trésor, West Hollywood, California, 877-482-7856.

WORK IT, GIRL

Page 87: Oscar de la Renta vest, \$1,090, shell, \$1,190, skirt, \$1,090, and shoes, \$890, Oscar de la Renta boutiques. Rue Gembon ear jacket, \$65, ruegembon.com. Mark Cross bag, \$2,195, barneys.com.

Page 88: Public School coat, \$1,325, barneys.com. Markoo dress, \$495, markoo.com for stores. Flaca Jewelry ear jacket, \$125, flacajewelry .com. Gianvito Rossi pumps, \$805, bergdorfgoodman.com.

Page 89: Salvatore Ferragamo fringe top*, and skirt, \$1,830, both at Salvatore Ferragamo boutiques. Flaca Jewelry earrings, \$135, flaca jewelry.com. Third Crown ring, \$280, thirdcrown.com.

Page 90: Peter Som shirtdress, \$1,195, and apron, \$1,095, petersom .com for info. Flaca Jewelry ring, \$115, flacajewelry.com. Gianvito Rossi heels, \$795, netaporter.com. Page 91: Miu Miu jacket, \$1,675, top, \$835, skirt \$895, belt, \$305, and mules*, all available at select Miu Miu Boutiques.

*price upon request







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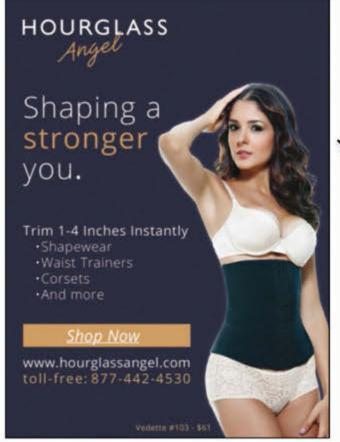












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APICS March 21 to April 19

OVERVIEW You're bold, decisive and a little cray cray, but in a good way. Your true motivation is to protect, support and nurture. Your short attention span makes finding your niche a challenge. Whether you're a lawyer, nurse, policeman, businessperson or housekeeper, you love leading the pack, and your over-the-top energy will drive any project to completion. Anyone interested in an Aries needs to look where the action is. When it's time to party, you'll be the life of it or die trying. A fire sign, you're compatible with Leo, Sagittarius, Gemini and Aquarius, but your attraction to Libra, your opposite, breaks all records. THE YEAR AHEAD Your love life is amped, as exes and potentials vie for your attention. When it's time to seal the deal, retreat, reflect and then decide. THIS MONTH LOVE: Your charm and It factor wreak havoc, so tread lightly. Couples, it's time to recapture the magic. WORK: Concentrate on getting ahead of the game and leaving the haters in the dust. MONEY: Saving may be new, but staying the course is key. INSPIRATION: Look beyond broken promises and find your own path.

Taurus

April 20 to May 20

LOVE: When it comes to your admirers, don't believe the hype. Couples, stay in touch with friends. WORK: Consider job offers carefully. MONEY: Focus on your life's mission and the rewards will come. INSPIRATION: Understanding your roots promotes strength of character.

Gemini

May 21 to June 20

LOVE: Relax and enjoy the ride with your beau. Couples, reconnect on a family vacation. **WORK:** Detractors question your abilities, but you

can't let what-ifs stop you from taking chances. **MONEY:** Lady Luck may be on your side, but don't squander your winnings. **INSPIRATION:** Overthinking won't allow you to savor the journey.

Cancer

June 21 to July 22

LOVE: Playing both ends against the middle is risky. WORK: Avoid colleagues who try to take advantage of your kindness. MONEY: When you put your skills and hobbies to good use, your earning power can't be denied. INSPIRATION: Adapting to change you can't control helps you grow.

Leo

July 23 to August 22

LOVE: Others may try to influence your choice, but follow your heart. Couples, compromise is the answer. WORK: Keep going despite the frustrations. MONEY: Your ideas can be parlayed into a profitable gig. INSPIRATION: Learn from your mistakes.

Virgo

August 23 to September 22

LOVE: When it's time to "meet the parents," don't sweat the process.

WORK: Allowing others to shine is a position of strength, not weakness.

MONEY: Research grants, tuition reimbursement or guaranteed student loans. INSPIRATION: When you worry, the rain will fill you and there won't be room for the rainbow.

Libra

► September 23 to October 22

LOVE: Possibilities get real now. Hit it or quit it. Couples, don't hold grudges. WORK: A new look offers a new outlook on your worthiness of a job change. MONEY: Hoard any bonus, winnings or dividends now for unexpected issues later. INSPIRATION: A doormat gets walked on. A peacemaker controls the walk. Know the difference.

Scorpio

Cotober 23 to November 21

LOVE: Your "horns" show as the search continues. Desperation is not a good look. **WORK:** Clear the air before a major project begins. There's no "I" in team. **MONEY:** Develop a plan and then follow through.

INSPIRATION: Centering yourself in the midst of a storm gives you clarity.

Sagittarius

November 22 to December 21

LOVE: Your bedroom antics may shock some, but not your Mr. Right. Couples, words hurt. WORK: When bosses accept your know-how, you'll be less stressed. MONEY: Reduce spending to offset school, car or home loans that are due. INSPIRATION: Encouraging others while encouraging yourself speaks to your spirituality.

Capricorn

December 22 to January 19

LOVE: Your libido is off the hook now. Embrace your inner freak. WORK: An unfulfilling career won't satisfy even if the salary is right. MONEY: Hope for the best but prepare for the worst when lending to family. INSPIRATION: A lack of support can mean a dream deferred, but not a dream denied.

Aquarius

▶ January 20 to February 18

LOVE: Putting your suitor in the friend zone is a no-brainer. WORK: A job change may not cure your restlessness. Try mapping your destiny. MONEY: When you and your partner don't communicate, financial woes continue. INSPIRATION: Your belief in others must spill over into a positive self-image.

Pisces

February 19 to March 20

LOVE: If a breakup is imminent, trust your gut. **WORK:** An ongoing problem can upset the apple cart. Fix it or let it go. **MONEY:** Last-minute tax filing creates undue stress. Get an extension. **INSPIRATION:** Your neglect can undermine your power.

Horoscope by **Thelma Balfour**, author of *Black Love Signs* and *Black Sun Signs* (Touchstone).

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A PRAYER FOR WORKING WOMEN

"A VIRTUOUS WOMAN IS A BUSINESSWOMAN," IS A MANTRA OF **TERA CARISSA HODGES**, A CORPORATE CONSULTANT AND SPIRITUAL THOUGHT LEADER. SHE SHARES A SPECIAL PRAYER FOR THE OFFICE

Dear God,

I come to you now THANKING YOU FOR BLESSING ME with the **opportunity to provide for myself**. I recognize my job as a resource, while YOU ARE THE SOURCE. I admit I am imperfect and may not always follow the instructions You have given me. **Please forgive me** and STRENGTHEN ME. I am seeking not only to have FAITH IN YOU but also to be a **light for you** even in my workplace.

Amen.



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